

EXECUTIVE BOARD

At a meeting of the Executive Board on Thursday, 12 December 2024 in DCBL Stadium, Widnes

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillors T. McInerney

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: G. Cook, S. Young, M. Reaney, E. Dawson, S. Wallace-Bonner, G. Ferguson, W. Rourke, J. Rosser and R. Rout

Also in attendance: None

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER POWERS AND DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

EXB60 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2024, were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

CORPORATE SERVICES PORTFOLIO

EXB61 DISCRETIONARY NON-DOMESTIC RATE RELIEF

The Board received a report from the Director of Finance, which presented one application 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 an application from Community Shop CIC, in relation to their respective address. Appended to the report was the potential annual cost to the Council of granting the discretionary rate relief. Currently,

where discretionary rate relief was granted to registered charities and non-profit organisations, it was provided until March 2025 in order to provide the organisations with some degree of certainty.

RESOLVED: That the application for 15% discretionary top-up relief from Community Shop CIC, be rejected for the reasons outlined within the report.

Director of
Finance

EXB62 SUNDRY DEBTS WRITE-OFF

The Board considered a report from the Director of Finance which sought approval for the write-off of a number of sundry debts, as the debtor had passed away and their estate had no remaining assets available to meet the outstanding debts.

It was noted that in 2019 the Council's Fraud Investigation Team identified that a significant fraud had been perpetrated against the Council relating to the receipt of Adults Direct Payments. A subsequent Police investigation revealed that the individual involved had been carrying out similar frauds against Oldham Council and the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP). In total the fraud amount to over £1m across the two Councils and the DWP, of which £240,095 related to Halton.

The individual had subsequently passed away and there were no assets remaining in the individual's estate from which the Council could obtain payment of the outstanding debts. As the debt could no longer be recovered, approval was sought to write-off the outstanding debts, which would be fully funded from the bad debt provision.

RESOLVED: That the write-off of debts against the bad debt provision, as outlined within the report, be approved.

Director of
Finance

EXB63 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE BOARD

The Board considered a report from the Director of Finance, which outlined two recommendations made by the Audit and Governance Board as detailed below. That Executive Board:

- make changes to the governance of the Transformation Programme by making changes to the Transformation Programme Board to increase

transparency, including the addition of two members of the Audit & Governance Board to the Transformation Programme Board, who should not also be Scrutiny (PPB) Chairs.

- ask each Executive/Corporate Director to identify what items of non-staff related expenditure are defined as essential to the delivery of services within their Directorate, and provide written justification for the essential spend designation, outside of which no other spending will be permitted.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) two members of the Audit and Governance Board be added to the membership of the Transformation Programme Board; and
- 2) Consideration be given to the recommendation from Audit and Governance Board as set out in paragraph 3.4 below, regarding a request to the Executive/Corporate Directors and a report be brought to a future Board meeting.

Corporate
Director - Chief
Executive's
Delivery Unit

EXB64 DIRECTORATE PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW REPORTS FOR QUARTER 2 2024 - 2025

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director – Chief Executive's Delivery Unit, on progress against key objectives/milestones and performance targets for the second quarter period to 31 March 2024, for the People Directorate (Social Care Health); and the Enterprise, Community and Resources Directorate.

The Board was advised that the Directorate Performance Overview Report provided a strategic summary of key issues arising from the relevant quarter for each Directorate and was aligned to Council priorities or functional areas. The Board noted that such information was key to the Council's performance management arrangements and Executive Board had a key role in monitoring performance and strengthening accountability. Performance Management would continue to be important in the demonstration of value for money and strengthening accountability.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the report, progress and performance information be noted;

Corporate
Director - Chief
Executive's
Delivery Unit

- 2) for future reports the finance and performance sections be reported separately; and
- 3) the finance section be reported to all Policy and Performance Boards.

CHILDREN YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES PORTFOLIO

EXB65 HIGH NEEDS PROVISION CAPITAL ALLOCATIONS – PROPOSED EXPANSION OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS & DISABILITY PROVISION: STATUTORY CONSULTATION FEEDBACK - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director, Children’s Services, that provided a summary of responses received during the representation period for the statutory consultation to expand the number of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) places available at Ashley School in Widnes, to meet need for children and young people with a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), taking the total number of places available at the school site from 112 to 152.

In addition, the report also requested approval to use any remaining balance from within the High Needs Provision Capital Funding to support further expansion of SEND provision within Halton, in discussion with relevant schools/educational settings as appropriate to meet identified SEND need.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) approves the expansion of Ashley School, Widnes for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder to become a 152 place school through the provision of four additional classrooms (subject to planning permission); and
- 2) approves the use of any remaining balance from the High Need Provision Capital funding to support further expansion of SEND provision within Halton.

Executive Director
of Children's
Services

HEALTH AND WELLBEING PORTFOLIO

EXB66 HEALTHIER FOOD AND DRINK ADVERTISING POLICY

The Board considered a report of the Director of Public Health, that outlined the implementation of a healthy food and drink advertising policy to ensure unhealthy

products are replaced by healthier alternatives on local authority advertising spaces. A copy of the proposed policy was attached as Appendix 2 to the report.

RESOLVED: That the Board approves the proposed policy and the benefits of its implementation.

Director of Public Health

EMPLOYMENT LEARNING AND SKILLS AND COMMUNITY PORTFOLIO

EXB67 PAYMENTS TO VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS - IMPACT MITIGATION PLAN

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director Environment and Regeneration, that set out proposals for how the Council could best support and assist the community and voluntary sector in the future. This followed the Council's decision to reduce the grants it provided to the community and voluntary sector.

The report outlined the support the Council currently provided to the sector and suggested several areas which through joint working and sharing resources; knowledge and experience could be pooled to provide best value to residents, communities and businesses in Halton. One of the areas where an immediate and positive impact would be felt would be to designate a lead officer for promoting and coordinating the Council's interface with the sector and the report outlined how this could be achieved.

It was noted that the Council Internal Audit Report on Payments to the voluntary sector had agreed several actions which included the development of a commissioning policy and performance management framework. If a Commissioning Framework was to be developed, it was recognised that there would be merit aligning it to the principles of Community Wealth Building (CWB) concept. Local authorities had been working with the Combined Authority through CLES to set out pillars of CWB, information on this was set out in Appendix 1.

RESOLVED: That the Board approves the proposals set out in sections 3.3 – 3.12 of the report.

Executive Director Environment & Regeneration

EXB68 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 PORTFOLIO

N.B. Councillor Nelson declared a Disclosable Other Interest in the following item of business as he has a family member who works for Halton Borough Council.

EXB69 STAFF UNPAID LEAVE

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director, Chief Executive's Delivery Unit, which provided a number of options following an organisational wide staff consultation in respect of reintroducing a four days unpaid leave arrangement at Christmas.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the preferred scheme option E for implementation of the four days unpaid leave during the Christmas period be approved, subject to the conclusion of the agreed consultation process which now includes the Budget Working Group;

Corporate
Director - Chief
Executive's
Delivery Unit

- 2) the Human Resources Operation Division, be authorised to begin the process for the implementation of the four days unpaid leave during the Christmas period, subject to the conclusion of the consultation process; and
- 3) the Chief Executive be granted delegated authority in consultation with the Portfolio Holder – Corporate Services to finalise the details of the proposal and to take all necessary steps to bring it into operation.

MINUTES ISSUED: 17 December 2024

CALL-IN: 24 December 2024 at 5.00 pm.

Any matter decided by the Executive Board may be called in no later than 5.00pm on 24 December 2024.

Meeting ended at 1.24 p.m.