

COUNCIL

At a meeting of the Council on Wednesday, 4 December 2024 in the Council Chamber, Runcorn Town Hall

Present: Councillors Abbott, Ball, Begg, Bevan, Bramwell, Carlin, Connolly, Dennett, Davidson, Fry, Garner, Gilligan, Harris, S. Hill, V. Hill, Hughes, Hutchinson, Jones, Leck, M. Lloyd Jones, P. Lloyd Jones, C. Loftus, K. Loftus, Logan, McDermott, A. McInerney, T. McInerney, Nelson, P. Nolan, Philbin, N. Plumpton Walsh, Polhill, Ratcliffe, Stockton, Teeling, Thompson, Thornton, Wainwright, Wall, Wallace, Wharton, Woolfall and Wright

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Baker, Dourley, A. Lowe, McDonough, L. Nolan, C. Plumpton Walsh, Rowe, Ryan, Stretch and Skinner

Absence declared on Council business: None

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

Also in attendance: L. Luddington and M. Green - Grant Thornton UK LLP

	<i>Action</i>
<p>COU42 COUNCIL MINUTES</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 23 October 2024 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.</p>	
<p>COU43 THE MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS</p> <p>The Mayor made the following announcements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">i. a book had been donated to the Council for display which contained photos of tiles which had been designed by Halton Primary Schools to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Halton Borough Council; andii. the following events had been arranged in aid of the Mayor's charity – the Halton Foundation, all are welcome to attend:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Abba Tribute – 14 December 2024• Soul Night – 13 December 2024	
<p>COU44 LEADER'S REPORT</p> <p>The Leader in his report to Council:</p>	

- welcomed representatives from the Council's External Auditors – Grant Thornton to the meeting;
- reflected on the recent Peer Review of the Council and advised that a report would be made available soon;
- provided an update on the Children Services Ofsted Inspection; and
- gave his best wishes to Members and staff for a happy Christmas and thanked everyone for their contributions in the past year.

COU45 URGENT DECISION

The Council considered a report of the Chief Executive, on the urgent decisions taken since the last meeting of the Council.

RESOLVED: That Council note the report.

N.B. Councillors Wharton and Thompson declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in the following item of business (Executive Board Minute No EXB42) as they are a Non-Executive Director of Mersey Gateway Crossings Board. Councillor Nelson moved and Councillor Harris seconded Minute No EXB42.

COU46 MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

The Council considered the minutes of the Executive Board meetings on 24 October and 14 November 2024.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be received.

COU47 MINUTES OF THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

The Council considered the minutes of the Health and Wellbeing Board meeting on 9 October 2024.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be received.

COU48 QUESTIONS ASKED UNDER STANDING ORDER 8

It was noted that no questions had been submitted under Standing Order No. 8.

COU49 2024/25 SPENDING AS AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2024 - EXB52

Council was asked to approve the Capital Programme as outlined in the attached report.

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; and
- 3) Council 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.

Director
Finance

of

COU50 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 25/26-27/28 - KEY DECISION - EXB53

Council considered a report of the Director of Finance, which detailed the Medium-Term Financial Strategy from 2025/26 – 2028/29 which had been produced using a prudent estimate of the financial conditions over the course of the next four years. The report also set out details of the application to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for Exceptional Financial Support

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.

Director
Finance

of

COU51 DETERMINATION OF COUNCIL TAX BASE 2025/26 - KEY DECISION - EXB54

The Council considered a report of the Director of Finance, on the determination of the Council Tax Base for 2025/26.

The Mayor asked if there were any observations or amendments to the proposals set out in the report and none were received. The recommendation was unanimously

approved by Council as detailed below.

RESOLVED: That Council

Director of
Finance

- 1) set 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) set 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

COU52 GAMBLING ACT 2005 STATEMENT OF GAMBLING POLICY

Council considered a report of the Director – Legal and Democratic Services, that contained a copy of the Statement of Gambling Policy which would come into effect from 31 January 2025.

RESOLVED: That Council

1. adopt the Statement of Gambling Policy attached to this report to come into effect immediately following the expiry of the current policy; and
2. directs that the Director – Legal and Democratic Services publishes the Statement of Gambling Policy in accordance with section 349 Gambling Act 2005 and the Gambling Act 2005 (Licensing Authority Policy Statement) (England and Wales) Regulations 2006.

COU53 MEMBERS ALLOWANCE REVIEW

Council was asked to approve the process for the review of the Members Allowances Scheme.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the report be noted; and
- 2) Council approves the process for the review of the Members Allowances Scheme set out.

Director, Legal
and Democratic
Services

COU54 EXTERNAL AUDITOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

Council considered a copy of the External Auditor's Report 2023/24 which was presented by Michael Green on behalf of Grant Thornton UK LLP.

A number of key recommendations and improvement recommendations were shown within the report along with management's responses to those recommendations. In addition, two Statutory Recommendations had been made (Appendix 1) which the Council was required to consider, confirm whether the recommendations were accepted and if so how they would be addressed.

On behalf of the Council, Councillor Dennett thanked Mr Green for the report.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the contents of the Auditor's Annual Report 2023/24 shown in the Appendix 2 be noted;
- 2) the two Statutory Recommendations highlighted within the Auditor's Annual Report 2023/24 be noted; and
- 3) the Council's responses to the Statutory Recommendations as detailed in Appendix 1, be approved.

Director of
Finance

COU55 ABSENCE OF A MEMBER

Under Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972, permission was sought for:

- Councillor Skinner to be granted a period of absence from attending Council meetings for a period of 6 months, concluding on 4 June 2025, due to Maternity Leave; and
- Councillor Stretch be granted a period of absence from attending Council meetings for a period of 6 months, concluding on 4 June 2025, due to personal reasons.

RESOLVED: That approval be given for the Member

Chief Executive

absence as outlined above.

COU56 APPLICATION FOR EXCEPTIONAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Council considered a report of the Director of Finance, that sought approval for the Council to submit an application to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, for Exceptional Financial Support. Details of the application would be finalised by the Director of Finance in consultation with the Corporate Services Portfolio Holder.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) an application for Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, as set out within the report, be approved;
- 2) the details of the EFS application be finalised by the Director of Finance in consultation with the Corporate Services Portfolio Holder;
- 3) all Directorates continue to implement control measures to reduce spending and help minimise the current year's overspend position; and
- 4) subject to recommendation (1) a robust, multi-year budget savings plan be prepared as a matter of urgency, as required as part of the EFS application.

Director of Finance

COU57 MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARDS AND THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE BOARD

The Council considered the reports of the following Boards in the period since the meeting of Council on 23 October 2024:-

- Children, Young People and Families
- Employment, Learning and Skills and Community;
- Safer;
- Environment and Urban Renewal; and
- Corporate Services

COU58 COMMITTEE MINUTES

The Council considered the reports of the following Committees in the period since the meeting of Council on 23 October 2024:-

- Development Management;
- Taxi Licensing Sub Committee;
- Regulatory Sub Committee; and
- Appointments Committee

COU59 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.

COU60 CHILDREN'S SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME FUNDING - WORKFORCE STABILISATION - KEY DECISION - EXB47

Council 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 2024. 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 in Halton; and
5. 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 24 October 2024 then the Implementation programme will commence following the completion of the call-in period, from 1 November 2024.

RESOLVED: That

Executive Director

1) Council be asked to approve the investment as defined in the report for improvement programme funding; and

of Children's Services

2) delegated authority to approve expenditure of the programme budget is given to the Executive Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Lead Member for Children & Young People.

COU61 LEGAL SERVICES TRANSFORMATION REPORT - KEY DECISION - EXB57

Council 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.

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

Director, Legal and Democratic Services

The Executive Board 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 the options of:

- Outsourcing,
- Formation of a collaboration / shared service with another Local Authority, and
- Wholly owned subsidiary Legal Company.

And Council approve the necessary funding set out in paragraph 5 of the report.

Meeting ended at 7.30 p.m.