

## **ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD**

*At a meeting of the Environment and Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board on Wednesday, 4 January 2012 at the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn*

Present: Councillors Hignett (Chairman), J. Gerrard (Vice-Chairman), Baker, J. Bradshaw, E. Cargill, Hodgkinson, A.McInerney, Nolan, Thompson, Wainwright and Zygadlo

Apologies for Absence: None

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: M. Noone, G. Ferguson, J. Unsworth, D. Cunliffe, W Rourke and S Eccles

Also in attendance: Councillors N Plumpton Walsh and C Plumpton Walsh. In accordance with Standing Order 31 Councillor Stockton.

### **ITEM DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD**

#### EUR30 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2011 having been printed and circulated were signed as a correct record.

#### EUR31 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

It was confirmed that no public questions had been received.

#### EUR32 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES

The Board considered the Minutes of the meetings of the Executive Board and Executive Board Sub Committee relevant to the Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes be received.

*Action*

## EUR33 SSP MINUTES

The Board received the draft Minutes of the Urban Renewal Specialist Strategic Partnership meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2011.

RESOLVED: That the draft Minutes be noted.

## EUR34 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT 2ND QUARTER

The Board received a report of the Chief Executive which detailed the second quarter performance management reports on progress against service plan objectives and performance targets, performance trends/comparisons and factors affecting the services for –

- Economy, Enterprise and Property (Development and Investment);
- Policy, Planning and Transportation (Highways and Transportation, Logistics and Transport Management, and Building Control and Contaminated Land);
- Environment and Regulatory Services (Waste and Environmental Improvement and Open Spaces); and
- Commissioning and Complex Care (Housing Strategy).

In receiving the second quarterly monitoring reports, Councillor Hodgkinson submitted the following questions:

### **Question 1**

I note that a major Gateway campaign at Runcorn Station with Virgin Trains was planned. The Borough has a station with hourly trains to Euston in a time of less than two hours. However, I always find there is chaos in the station forecourt and approach road whenever Virgin trains arrive or leave. Would Officers ask Virgin Trains to permit vehicles collecting passengers coming from the London direction to park in the little used west car park for up to say 15 minutes without payment? This would provide more space in the station forecourt for dropping off passengers and reduced congestion. Liverpool Airport offers this facility within the gated area.

### **Response**

We have put your question to Virgin Trains and their response was that customers can use their car parks for free for 20 minutes and there are signs up to this effect. If this is the case, it is possible people are either not reading/seeing

these signs or do not wish to take advantage of the 'offer' preferring the convenience of parking as close as possible to the station buildings.

## **Question 2**

The Planning Application targets are not being met. As the Development Control Committee Member, I want to ensure that development issues are adequately examined, as we have to live with the consequences. However, are any non-controversial development approvals being delayed due to lack of staff and could this have implications for employment in the Borough? If this is the case, have we looked at the possibility of taking on temporary staff or using planning consultants?

## **Response**

The speed of planning application processing continues to be impacted due to an increase in the application workload per officer, primarily from the more major applications such as the Mersey Gateway, Ineos and 3MG. Pressure is also exerted by tasks outside of the application process that NI 157 specifically measures. For example, pre-application enquiries, Section 106 negotiation, Condition monitoring, enforcement activity, defending appeals, and other general enquiries. As a result, performance has been compressed while system capacity is fully consumed. Currently, the Development Control (DC) Team operates with 4.3 FTE (1 Team Leader, 2.3 DC Planners, 1 Enforcement Officer). To make best use of these scarce resources the more straight forward applications (householder applications e.g. extensions) are partially dealt with by consultants (St Helen's Council) on a per application basis with HBC retaining control over the granting of consent. This allows the Council's permanent staff to deal with the more complex and contentious applications where local experience and an in-depth understanding of Council policy and practice is vital to the delivery of sound, transparent and justified planning decisions in the best interests of our Borough. This service area has a carefully balanced budget and operates from a net zero budget position where costs are fully covered from application fees. The challenge that arises with the use of temporary staff and consultants is balancing expeditious decision making against operating what is essentially an expedient and zero cost service that does not impact negatively on the Council's overall budgetary position.

### Question 3

The number of third party compensation claims due to alleged highway/footway defects have increased. A few years ago, the Council decided that it would have a regular inspection system followed by action to repair defects to demonstrate in Court that all reasonable efforts were being made to check highways, footways and repair defects. Has the Council reduced this activity due to spending constraints or are many of the claims simply spurious?

#### Response

Our inspection regime under S58 of the Highways Act has not changed. Indeed we are looking to increase what we inspect in light of the Gullikson ruling which made the Council as Highway Authority responsible for footpaths/footways that were once deemed to be the responsibility of housing associations or trusts. Our current regime is:

Town Centres – Inspected monthly

All other Roads and Footpaths – Inspected quarterly

Expressways and Busways that have no pedestrian access – Inspected from vehicle quarterly

Gullikson footpaths and some cycleways – Inspected 6 monthly.

A commitment was given to check the number of claims but whilst they appear to be higher than anticipated, we continue to have a very good record in defending such claims due to the above regime. (The number was subsequently checked and found to be correct). Based on the figure of 72 we are suggesting that the annual target will not be met but this may not be the case. We obviously have no control over the number of claims made and an increase could be due to a number of factors including our additional responsibilities for footpaths and insurance companies encouraging people to submit claims. The number of claims can and does fluctuate over time. We will have a better idea at year end.

It was agreed that a copy of the above questions and responses be circulated to members of the Board.

An update on the progress of the draft Runcorn Town Centre action plan was requested by a member of the Board. In response, it was noted that Savills had been appointed to progress development options within the Town Centre and take them to the market place. It was agreed

that an interim update report, including the level of interest generated in the market place, be brought to the next meeting of the Board.

RESOLVED: That the 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Performance Management Report be received.

#### EUR35 MERSEY GATEWAY AND TOURISM POTENTIAL

The Board considered a report which outlined the potential for tourism relating to the construction of the Mersey Gateway. A scoping paper had been developed to consider the potential impact the construction of the Mersey Gateway could have on tourism in the Borough. If benefits were to be maximised, it was important to plan proactively rather than be reactive to opportunities as they arose. The report considered the potential tourism benefits and possible activities through a number of case studies of construction related projects. Key elements of a response could include –

- viewing Points;
- virtual Viewing Platform;
- marketing and Promotion;
- contractor Involvement
- employment and Skills; and
- local Heritage Context.

It was anticipated that working in Partnership with local tourism operators and importantly a future concessionaire would be an important aspect. Following discussions at the local tourism network a number of hotels and tourist operators had expressed an interest in working together and a number had volunteered to be part of a Delivery Group.

It was noted that objectives associated with the project would need to be clarified early on. Suggested objectives for consideration included:

- raise the profile of Halton;
- promote the visitor economy and the businesses contained therein;
- support existing visitor destinations;
- promotion of Halton and broader investment opportunities;
- capitalise on the broader historical and heritage assets associated with the crossing of the Mersey; and
- create safe, accessible and managed viewing areas

for visitors and the local community.

Arising from the discussion the following suggestions were put forward as potential for tourism: bridge climbing, extreme sports, a viewing point at the Catalyst Museum, updates at local cinemas and a visitors centre. Members were, however, reminded that under the Transport and Works Act, general pedestrian traffic will not be allowed on the Mersey Gateway and hence this could restrict the type of tourist activities allowed on the bridge itself.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Board be requested to consider the potential for tourism activity related to the construction of the Mersey Gateway.

Strategic Director  
Children and  
Enterprise

#### EUR36 ABANDONED SHOPPING TROLLEYS

The Board received an update report on the progress made in respect of reducing the nuisance caused by Abandoned Shopping Trolleys in the Borough. The Board had previously endorsed a draft Abandoned Shopping Trolley policy and made recommendations in respect of its adoption (Minute 51 refers). The draft policy was subsequently approved by full Council on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2011 and came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2011.

It was reported that legislation allowed local authorities to enter into agreements with local retailers, in which the retailers undertook to collect all abandoned trolleys notified within a specified period of time. Officers had identified 22 retailers in Halton who provided shopping trolleys for use by customers. To date, 16 retailers had signed up to the voluntary protocol and responses were awaited from the remaining 6 retailers, who had each been contacted by officers and sent a copy of the protocol for consideration. It was noted that between 1<sup>st</sup> August and 30<sup>th</sup> November 2011 the following activity had taken place:

- 160 trolleys had been identified as being abandoned across the Borough;
- 129 were collected by the responsible store within the timescales required by the voluntary protocol;
- 31 trolleys were collected by the Council, either as a result of responsible store not having signed up to the protocol or, where they had, failed to recover the trolley within the required timescales; and
- The Council had invoiced the responsible stores a total of £1,345 for the recovery of the 31 abandoned trolleys.

In Runcorn, Tesco and Asda stores experienced the highest number of trolleys being removed and abandoned by customers. Both stores were working pro-actively to help tackle this problem and in addition to signing the voluntary protocol, Asda had employed Trolleywise a national company, to collect abandoned trolleys on their behalf. Since the beginning of September the company had recovered 83 abandoned shopping trolleys over and above those reported to the store by the Council.

In addition, Tesco employed Trolley Collection Service (TCS), a regional company to collect abandoned trolleys on their behalf. Since the beginning of September TCS had recovered 300 abandoned shopping trolleys over and above those reported to the store by the Council. Tesco had also implemented a civil recovery scheme aimed at customers who removed trolleys. They had also fitted coin locks to their trolleys in an attempt to reduce the removal from Halton Lea Shopping Centre.

Arising from the discussion it was agreed that Asda and Tesco would be contacted to enquire if a contact number for the Contractors collecting trolleys could be given to Councillors and members of the public.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

#### EUR37 FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT GOVERNANCE AND PROGRESS REPORT

The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director Policy and Resources which informed Members on Flood Risk Management and provided an update on the following:

- the introduction of new duties under the Flood and Water Management Act (2010);
- the production of Halton's Surface Water Management Plan (SWMP) and current activity in flood risk management; and
- the opportunities to engage through Member representation and involvement in new regional sub group arrangements.

It was noted that as portfolio holder with responsibility for flood risk management, Councillor John Stockton had been nominated to attend the Cheshire and Mid Mersey Flood Risk Partnership Sub Group. The Sub Group had subsequently nominated two members to the North West Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (NWRFCC), these

being Alison Bacon (St. Helens) and Councillor Linda Dirir (Warrington).

With regard the Flood and Water Management Act which became law in April 2010 and was being implemented using a phased approach, to date there had been five commencement orders, each introducing specific provisions of the Act. The key provisions as they affected Halton as a lead Local Flood Authority were summarised in the report together with the expected timetable for the introduction of the remaining sections of the Act.

In addition, Members received a short presentation detailing the progress on the production of Halton's Surface Water Management Plan. By utilising the grant funding awarded for the project, work on the study had progressed through to the "Options" stage. A comprehensive report, detailing the flood risk assessments, results and findings and the conclusions drawn from the study had been produced.

The presentation outlined the process employed during the study together with its outputs and conclusions. It also outlined a series of maps which had been produced, using fresh hydraulic modelling of surface water for the whole Borough and illustrating flood depth, flood velocity and flood hazard. The report concluded that surface water flooding in the Borough of Halton was characterised by a large number of discreet, small areas of flooding, spread across the Borough. There was no single large area of potential flooding. Some of the flood areas were coincident with or adjacent to property and this would have an impact upon the community in those areas. Sections of essential transport infrastructure had also been identified as vulnerable to surface water flooding.

It was noted that a methodology had been developed to identify the impact of flooding on property and infrastructure in order to highlight hot spots where surface water flooding could be expected to have the most significant impact. It was agreed that all Members would be sent a copy of the relevant hot spots.

With regard to current activities the following had been implemented:

- a total of £207,750 had been awarded this year for property level flood protection covering areas of Widnes that were vulnerable to surface water flooding. A contribution towards the cost of these



projects was being made from Halton's Capital Programme budget allocation for 2011/12;

- additional improvements to surface water drainage were being implemented at Morley Road, Prescott Road and Foxcote to resolve localised flooding problems;
- the Environment Agency had awarded £21,000 of funding for survey work on production of a feasibility report into repair of the existing shoreline protection armouring at Pickerings Pasture, Widnes;
- the Environment Agency had also provided £1m towards the cost of flood defence works at Keckwick Brook to reduce flood risk to properties in Sandymoor; and
- DEFRA had awarded £35,000 towards a scheme to strengthen Wharford Farm reservoir embankment which was now complete.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the proposed arrangements for local member representation on the NW RFCC be noted; and
- (2) the progress made in the development of Halton's SWMP and the work currently underway to address flood risk across the Borough be welcomed.

*(NB: Councillor Wainwright declared a Personal Interest in the following item of business as he was Chair of Halton Transport Ltd).*

#### EUR38 LOCAL SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT FUND

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director Policy and Resources which informed Members on the Local Strategic Transport Fund (LSTF) and sought approval for the approach that the Council was taking in regards to preparation of bids for this fund.

It was noted that the Government was providing £560m for the LSTF to challenge local authorities outside London to bid for funding to support packages of transport intervention that supported economic growth and reduce carbon emissions in their communities as well as delivering cleaner environments and improved air quality, enhanced

safety and reduced congestion. The fund would include a mix of £350m revenue and £210m capital funding over four years between 2011/12 to 2014/15.

Members were advised that two types of bids could be made, a small project bid of up to £5m and a large project bid of over £5m and up to £50m. The bidding guidance stated that only one bid would be accepted from each local authority, however collaborative proposals would also be considered by the DfT.

It was envisaged that Halton's bid would be in the order of £4.8m and would focus on sustainable transport to employment areas. This would address the Government's transport priorities of economic growth and carbon reduction. The bid was entitled "Routes to Prosperity" and complements the Merseyside bid. It covered the following broad areas actions and initiatives:-

- working with partners to improve access to employment;
- promoting smarter transport choices and encouraging behavioural change; and
- sustainable transport infrastructure measures to include enhanced provision for walking, cycling and public transport.

Halton's bid would cover the financial years 2012/13 to 2014/15 and would be made in tranche 2 (February 2012).

In addition, it was proposed that a joint bid with St. Helens and Warrington, with St. Helens taking the lead on bid preparation, would be submitted. The bid was entitled "Mid Mersey Sustainable Cross Boundary Links" and aimed to be similar to the Halton bid but focussed on more strategic travel to employment sites. The bid would be in the order of £3.2m plus local contributions.

RESOLVED: That

1. the suggested approach for the Halton LSTF bid be approved; and
2. the suggested approach for the joint Mid-Mersey bid be approved.

*(NB: Councillor Hignett declared a Personal Interest in the following item of business as he was an employee of CIC).*

#### EUR39 MINUTES FROM WASTE TOPIC GROUP

The Board considered a copy of the notes of a meeting of the Waste Topic Group which took place on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2011. The Topic Group had discussed the recent introduction of a bin charging policy. The current policy allowed a charge to be waived where it would cause significant hardship. However, the Topic Group was advised that on occasions, due to particular circumstances surrounding the loss of a bin, discretion to waive the charge could be considered.

The Waste Topic Group had recommended that delegated officers and Members have the discretion to waive bin charges in other exceptional circumstances.

RESOLVED: Members of the Board supported that the delegated Officers and Members have the discretion to waive bin charges in other exceptional circumstances.

Strategic Director  
Communities

#### EUR40 BUSINESS PLANNING 2012-15

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Policy and Resources which provided Members with an update on Business Planning for the period 2012-15 and the Directorate priorities, objectives and targets for the services for this period that fell within the remit of the Board.

The Board was advised that each Directorate was required to develop a medium term business plan, in parallel with the budget, that was subject to annual review and refresh. Draft service plan objectives and performance indicators and targets had been developed by each Department and the information had been included in the appendices to the report. These objectives and measures would form the basis of the Quarterly Performance Monitoring received by the Board during the future year. It was reported that the Key Priorities for development or improvement in 2012-15, were discussed by Members at the previous meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2011, and had now been reflected in the draft plans. It was reported that comments could also be made to the relevant Operational Director by no later than 18<sup>th</sup> January 2012 to allow inclusion in the draft Business Plan.

Furthermore, it was reported that the draft Directorate Business Plan would be revised following Member comments during January and would be presented to the Executive Board for approval on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2012, at the same time as the draft budget, this would ensure that

decisions on Business Planning were linked to resource allocations. All Directorate Plans would be considered by full Council on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2012.

In conclusion, it was reported that it should be noted that plans could only be finalised once budget decisions had been confirmed in March and that some target information may need to be reviewed as a result of final outturn data becoming available post March 2012.

RESOLVED: That

1. the report be noted; and
2. Members of the Board pass any detailed comments that they may have on the information in the report to the relevant Operational Director by 18<sup>th</sup> January 2012.

*Meeting ended at 8.20 p.m.*