

EXECUTIVE BOARD

At a meeting of the Executive Board on Thursday, 7 June 2007 at the Marketing Suite, Municipal Building

Present: Councillors McDermott (Chairman), D. Cargill, Harris, McInerney, Polhill, Nelson, Swain, Wright and Wharton

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Gerrard

Absence declared on Council business: Councillor (none)

Officers present: D. Johnson, I. Leivesley, G. Meehan, D. Parr, D. Tregoe, M. Winstanley and L. Cairns

Also in attendance: J. Farmer and C. Williams

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER POWERS AND DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

		<i>Action</i>
EXB1	MINUTES	
	<p>The Minutes of the meeting held on 16th May 2007 were taken as read and agreed as a correct record.</p>	
EXB2	AUDIT COMMISSION AUDIT AND INSPECTION PLAN FOR HALTON BOROUGH COUNCIL 2007-08	
	<p>The Board received a presentation from Mr. J. Farmer and Ms. C. Williams on the Council's Audit and Inspection Plan 2007/2008: a copy of the Audit was included with the agenda.</p> <p>In particular, the Board noted the "Initial Risk Assessment – Use of Resources" outlined at Appendix 1 of the report. This assessment gave a view of where the Council was at the moment, possible risks, mitigating action taken by the Council to minimise these risks and any subsequent actions required by the auditor. Ms Williams confirmed that a lot of mitigating action was already in place, indicating that the Council was a self-aware organisation.</p> <p>In addition, the Board considered the following points:</p>	

- funding streams, which were coming to an end beyond the local authority's control;
- health inequalities and the need to take into account that, in the transition to Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), this was a responsibility for organisations across the area;
- fees for joint projects and how these were to be calculated, ie based on the size of the audit fee, linked to expenditure, but excluding Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA);
- the ability to engage nationally with the Department of Health and Government Office in order to address the issue of targets that were based on managing illness rather than prevention; and
- partnership work undertaken in Manchester, which had had demonstrable benefits for that area with the outcomes recognised nationally.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Farmer and Miss Williams for attending the meeting.

EXB3 CPA 2007 TO CAA 2009

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy providing a summary of the Audit Commission's Consultation on the move from the current Comprehensive Performance Assessment regime (CPA) to the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAS) in 2009.

The consultation detailed the draft service assessment framework for the Environment, Housing in the Community, and the Culture Service Blocks in CPA 2007. It was apparent that a number of the Performance Indicators that were proposed for introduction or amendment for CPA 2007 would now not be included or amended.

The appendices to the report gave:

- (1) a summary of arrangements for the assessment of CPA 2007 and consultation questions;
- (2) a summary of the approach to CPA assessment for the transitional year 2008/09 and consultation questions;
- (3) a summary of principles for developing CAA to commence April 2009; and
- (4) CPA 2007 critical indicators update.

The Board was advised that the consultation closed on 14th June 2007. The Audit Commission stated that it believed CPA still had an important part to play in continuing to support improvement and the last set of CPA results would aid in making the first set of new CAA judgements in 2009/10.

RESOLVED: That the Council's response to the Audit Commission's Consultation be based on the suggestions in Annexes 1 – 3 of the report.

EXB4 ALLEY GATES AND GATING ORDERS

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Health and Community proposing a procedure for managing all issues relating to Alley Gates.

Following a meeting of the Board on 7th December 2006, a working group had met on four occasions to establish a draft operational procedure. The working group felt that a simple approach should be adopted that was easily understandable by the public with the Halton Direct Link (HDL) being the “one stop shop” for alley gates.

Within the procedure, provisions were made for:

- repair and maintenance issues;
- lost keys;
- new gates; and
- neighbourhood issues.

The Board noted that all requests for new gates would be passed to the Community Safety Team by HDL in order that the viability of the proposals could be assessed. The findings of the team would be reported to the relevant Area Forum, which would consider the request in light of the Community Safety advice. The Forum would decide if funding was available and whether it wished to proceed. New gates would be funded by Area Forums as agreed by the Executive Board on 7th December unless alternative grant funding could be identified. In addition, £34,000 had been approved by full Council in the 2007/08 budget as a growth item to cover on-going maintenance costs.

The Board considered the following issues:

- the possibility of residents maintaining their own gates and the need for a process to ensure a standard of quality;

- that some publicity would be undertaken which highlighted the process surrounding alley gates; and
- the effectiveness of alley gates.

Councillor Nelson, Portfolio holder for Neighbourhood, Management and Development, thanked the members of the Working Group for their input.

RESOLVED: That the operational procedures, as outlined in paragraph 4 of the report, be approved.

EXB5 EXPANDING THE PROGRAMME OF REGENERATING HALTON'S EMPLOYMENT SITES

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Environment outlining the recommendations of a Topic Team, endorsed by the Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board on 21st March 2007, regarding the options for sustaining and expanding the current programme of regenerating Halton's employment sites.

The Business Parks Improvement Programme (BPIP) comprised the merger of the Business Improvement Scheme and Greening Employment Areas Project, both of which had operated for the last three years. The BPIP worked with business and property owners located on Astmoor, Halebank, and Riverview Industrial Estates to compliment other regeneration projects that were taking place in the Borough. Business-led Steering Groups had been established in each of the target areas and were implementing jointly agreed action plans aimed at addressing the local needs and priorities of the resident businesses. The focus of attention covered a range of initiatives, which were outlined for the Board's information.

It was advised that there was a danger that Halton's key employment sites could experience similar problems to those identified on these industrial estates and it was therefore considered prudent to explore the options for extending the BPIP to other industrial estates in the Borough as a preventative measure.

The methodology of the Scrutiny Topic Group was outlined together with an assessment of the BPIP. A bid survey had been conducted on Astmoor, Halebank and Riverview, and an assessment of need in other industrial areas had been carried out. Key recommendations had arisen from this, which were described in the report.

RESOLVED: That the key recommendations of the Scrutiny Topic Team, set out in paragraphs 7.4 to 7.7 and paragraph 8.4 of the report, be approved.

EXB6 FUTURE OF HALTON LEA POST OFFICE

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy regarding the consultation exercise being undertaken by the Post Office on the future arrangements for the provision of Post Office Services in Halton Lea Shopping Centre. The proposal was to transfer the existing Post Office Services from the existing location at 88 Forest Walk to the branch of WH Smith within Halton Lea. Attached as Appendix 1 to the report was a copy of a letter received from the National Consultation Manager from Post Office Limited which provided more details of the proposals.

The Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board (PPB) had invited representatives from the Post Office to its next meeting on 20th June 2007 to provide more details on the proposed changes. Unfortunately, this would be after the date set by the Post Office for the receipt of comments: the deadline was 14th June 2007.

RESOLVED: That the Council:

- (1) submits an interim objection to the new arrangements until the meeting of the Urban Renewal PPB takes place;
- (2) requests to see the proposed layout of the new facilities; and
- (3) authorises the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy, in consultation with the Executive Board Member for Corporate Services, to make further comments after the meeting of the Urban Renewal PPB.

Strategic Director
- Corporate and
Policy

EXB7 PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE UNITARY STRUCTURES IN CHESHIRE

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director - Corporate and Policy outlining the current consultation exercise being undertaken by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in relation to proposals for new Unitary Structures in England.

In January 2007, the Government received 26 proposals from Councils wishing to move to a single tier of local government. All proposals were assessed against criteria that the government had set out and the Secretary of State had decided that sixteen should proceed to consultation. Two of those proposals affected the neighbouring Cheshire and the Secretary of State was consulting stakeholders on the following two structures:

- a single unitary Council based on the boundary of the existing County Council; and
- two unitary authorities made up from the existing district boundaries as follows:
 - (i) Chester, Ellesmere Port and Neston, and Vale Royal; and
 - (ii) Macclesfield, Congleton and Crewe.

Support for each of these options was outlined for the Board's consideration, as were the issues for Halton. In particular, Members noted that the granting of Unitary Status for Halton in 1996 had had a major positive impact on the Borough. In addition, the impact of each of the proposed changes on the sub-regional and regional structures in the North West was taken into account.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the move to Unitary Status in Cheshire be supported on the basis of the clear benefits it had brought to Halton since 1998;
- (2) the two Unitary option be supported, given that it will enhance sub-regional working arrangements in the Liverpool City Region and the North West; and
- (3) all Cheshire Local Authorities, Merseyside Local Authorities, local MPs and the DCLG be informed of this decision.

Strategic Director
- Corporate and
Policy

EXB8 APPLICATION FOR TWINNING GRANT

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy outlining the details of an application being made to the Twinning Grant Fund from Fairfield High School requesting support for a visit of 10 GCSE Art Students and 2 adults to No. 1 High School in Tongling.

The students' coursework had been inspired by work donated to the school by Tongling pupils during their visit to Fairfield High School in May 2006. During the visit by the Tongling pupils, they visited local art galleries and enjoyed the British Arts. In Tongling, the Fairfield pupils would showcase their artwork and see the artwork produced by the Chinese pupils since that visit, and would enjoy a full experience of Chinese culture.

Details of the costs involved were outlined for the Board's consideration. It was noted that the school had been fundraising for the visit and had raised £2,000 so far. It had also received £500 in donations from local companies and a grant from the British Council of £5,000.

RESOLVED: That a grant of £3,000 be awarded to the Fairfield High School.

EXB9 LOCAL AREA AGREEMENTS

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy seeking formal approval to the final Local Area Agreement (LAA) document signed by Ministers, and alerting Members to some of the considerations of how Government intended to develop LAA's as a policy tool.

It was noted that a LAA was a three-year protocol that set out the priorities for a local area. This had to be agreed between central Government and the area itself, as represented by the lead local authority and other key partners through local strategic partnership.

At its meeting in December, the Executive Board had endorsed the final draft local agreement for Halton and its formal submission to Government. Following its submission, a number of comments were received from officials at Government Office North West (GONW): the LAA had been considered largely fit for purpose and the substantive comments made were outlined for the Board's consideration.

The Halton LAA, which included the changes outlined, had been signed off by Ministers the previous month and was now operational. The formal Grant Determination letter had been received setting out the special funding from Government in support of the LAA for 2007/08. This was in line with the expectations set out in the financial table of the LAA.

Implications of the Local Government White Paper “Strong and Prosperous Communities”, and the impact on LAAs, were outlined for the Board’s information. Funding implications were also considered together with an indicative timetable for 2007/08. The Government had informed the Council that new model LAAs would need to be ready by June 2008.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the final agreement agreed with Government be adopted; and
- (2) the emerging requirements for “new model” LAAs contained in the Local Government Bill be noted.

EXB10 APPOINTMENT OF CONSULTING ENGINEER FOR DESIGN OF HIGHWAY INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Environment seeking approval for the waiver of Procurement Standing Orders for the award of highway infrastructure design work to appoint consulting engineers by the single tender contract procedure.

It was noted that design work for the new highway access to the Mersey Multi Modal Gateway (3MG) freight park had now progressed to the detailed design stage. In order to meet the tight timescales required for delivery of this project, and to keep to the programmed network railway possessions currently planned for the construction of the replacement Hale Road Bridge, it was necessary to proceed with detailed design work without delay. The implications of missing the critical railway possession date was that additional costs would be incurred in arranging for an additional possession, and the provision of highway access to the site would be delayed.

Atkins Highways and Transportation had been involved in the 3MG since its inception, producing a number of reports and outputs relating to the project, which were outlined for the Board’s consideration. This company was therefore considered to offer the most efficient and cost-effective means of delivering the next stage of design work.

The Board was advised that undertaking a competitive tendering process would delay the start of the detailed design and the use of Atkins had an added advantage for the management of the project in that its Rail Infrastructure Division was lead consultant for Network Rail

in the replacement of the Hale Road bridge. It was therefore considered that the appointment of Atkins for this work would provide the Council with a clear financial and commercial benefit in bringing the 3MG site to the market on-programme.

Value for money, transparency, proprietary and accountability issues would be managed through a number of measures, which were outlined in the report for the Board's consideration. In addition, it was confirmed that the fees levied by Atkins could be assessed against existing contracts for comparability.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) Procurement Standing Orders 3.1 to 3.6 be waived; and
- (2) Atkins Highways and Transportation be invited to submit a price under the single tender contract procedure in accordance with Procurement Standing Order 1.5.

MINUTES ISSUED: 20th June 2007

CALL IN: 27th June 2007

Any matter decided by the Executive Board may be called in no later than 27th June 2007

Meeting ended at 3.15 p.m.