

REPORT TO: Executive Board
DATE: 5th June 2008
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy
SUBJECT: Local Area Agreements
WARDS: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 A Local Area Agreement is a 3-year protocol that sets out the priorities for a local area. This must be agreed between central government and the area itself, as represented by the lead local authority and other key partners through Local Strategic Partnership. Halton has had in place an Agreement since April 2007. However, part of the new Local Government Act, Communities and Local Government (CLG) announced that the current framework of Local Area Agreements would be replaced with new Local Area Agreements from 2008. The timetable dictates that Ministers must sign off the final version by June 2008.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide Executive Board with the latest draft of Halton's new Local Area Agreement for endorsement and sign off on behalf of Halton Borough Council.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Executive Board:

- 2.1 endorse the LAA on behalf of Halton Borough Council (Annex A) and approve it for sign off by Ministers.**
- 2.2 Delegate authority to the Strategic Director Corporate and Policy, to make any final amendments following continuing dialogue with GONW.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 At the Executive Board meeting on 10th April 2008, members were provided with a report on the LAA, outlining the structure and process for development. Partners in Halton have been working in recent months to produce a new LAA document in line with Government requirements. The "Story of place" and initial draft outcomes framework

was agreed by Executive Board in April. Since then, a series of negotiation meetings have been held with Government.

- 3.2 At the core of the LAA is the outcomes framework. This has been the focus of the negotiation process with GONW. At annex A is the current draft. The Board will see that the list of designated indicators stands at 32 in total, plus the 16 mandatory children and young people indicators. This is the final list which has been agreed with government. The Board will also see that baselines and trajectories for all of the indicators are now in place.
- 3.3 The other issue for note concerns local indicators. In theory these can be of great interest because they demonstrate the wider focus of the partnership and provide a vehicle for partners within Halton to hold each other to account. However, our view is that we already have a number of significant strategic documents that fulfil this purpose. In particular the Sustainable Community Strategy and SSP Action Plans already have embedded within them aims, objectives and indicators that provide the full picture of what the partnerships ambitions are for Halton. We already have in place through our Performance Management Framework mechanisms to report regularly on these and hold each other to account.
- 3.4 Therefore, our position is that we are not including local indicators in the LAA. To do so we would merely be repeating indicators that we have elsewhere. Government Office has agreed with this approach.
- 3.5 The only other outstanding issue of note concerns reward grant. As reported to the Board last time the LAA regime does make provision for this. However, the amount involved for Halton is likely to be much smaller scale than in previous incarnations – perhaps up to £1M. The methodology is still being developed by government but is likely to be based on performance across all LAA targets, and not just a select handful. There is also the possibility of a separate reward grant opportunity for areas in receipt of Working Neighbourhoods Fund. This would have an obvious focus on the achievement of outcomes on worklessness and skills. Further guidance on this from Government is expected later in the year. At that point a further report will be brought forward to Executive Board setting out the financial implications.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Our emerging LAA is founded on our current Community Strategy, and clearly follows the reasoning and rationale adopted in our current LAA. At its core is the need to agree an outcomes framework that describes local aspirations and will act as a framework for future action. The Board will see that this is now at an advanced stage and is offered for adoption by the Board. The Board should also agree that the Strategic Director, Corporate and Policy be given delegated approval to make

any final amendments of the outcome framework, which may be requested by Government before the final Ministerial sign off in June.

- 4.2 It should also be remembered that the LAA lasts only for three years. Our overall ambitions for Halton are set out in the Community Strategy/Corporate Plan and recognize that consistent effort behind our priorities will be needed for 15-25 years for them to be realised. The LAA forms just one part of the delivery chain for our overall priorities. It is informed by the new State of Halton report, which concludes that four vital issues demand attention in the medium term – health inequalities, crime, worklessness and skills, and the narrowing of the gap between areas within Halton.

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 A Local Area Agreement is a 3 year agreement that sets out the priorities for a local area, agreed between central government and a local area, represented by the lead local authority and other key partners through Local Strategic Partnerships. The Local Area Agreement provides a service improvement tool for helping to implement Halton's adopted Community Strategy.

6.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no other implications arising from this report.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

- 7.1 There are significant implications for all Council priorities. The Agreement can be seen as a three-year operational plan for the Community Strategy. As such it provides a focus for everything the Council and its partners will be doing to address all of the Council's strategic priorities.

8.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 8.1 The Agreement includes proposals for a robust risk management process. This focuses attention and resources on critical areas, to provide more robust action plans and better-informed decision-making. There is already in place a Risk Register covering the strategic and operational risks around the current Local Area Agreement. This register will be fundamentally revised once the new Agreement is in place.

9.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 9.1 The Local Area Agreement is based on the same values that underpin the Community Strategy and Corporate Plan. These make explicit a

commitment to equality and diversity. The new Agreement reinforces this value-driven system of corporate and partnership working.

10.0 REASON (S) FOR DECISION

- 10.1 Under the new Local Government Act (2007) there is a statutory duty on all local authorities to produce a Local Area Agreement to the format and timetable set down by Government.

11.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 11.1 No other options were pursued. The Agreement process is a prescriptive one and Halton has followed Government guidance.

12.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

- 12.1 The Local Area Agreement will come into force when the Agreement in its final form is agreed and signed by the Minister for Local Government. This is expected to take place in June 2008.

13.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Halton Local Area Agreement – 2008-11 is available from:
Debbie Houghton/Shelah Semoff *2nd floor Municipal Building*
Contact number 0151 471 7528 or ext 1154.