

EXECUTIVE BOARD SUB COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the Executive Board Sub Committee on Friday, 25 July 2008 in the Marketing Suite, Municipal Building

Present: Councillors Wharton (Chairman) and Harris

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Nelson

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: M. Reaney, H. Coen, J. Downes, C. Halpin, N. MacFarlane, R. Apter and E. Dawson

Also in attendance: None

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER POWERS AND DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE SUB-COMMITTEE

Action

COMMUNITY PORTFOLIO

ES13 INTRODUCTION OF CIVIL FUNERAL CEREMONIES

The Sub Committee received a report of the Strategic Director, Health and Community which sought approval for the Registration Service to introduce civil funeral ceremonies.

The Government White Paper "Civil Registration: Vital Change" set out an agenda for a modern, effective and high quality Registration Service. To underpin this, local authorities were given more responsibility for local service delivery that would meet both national standards and local community needs.

As part of this modernisation agenda, the Registration Service pursued new governance arrangements and the new "Halton Registration Scheme 2007" came into effect on 4 July 2007.

In relation to Civil Funerals, the White Paper reads, "As society changes and develops, there may be other celebratory services that local authorities would wish to provide such as civil funerals." The availability of celebratory services would be included as an element of national standards of service provision. Local authorities would be required to deliver these services locally or direct enquiries to other neighbouring authorities where such services were provided.

Since 2006 the Service had conducted naming ceremonies and ceremonies for the re-affirmation of marriage vows. These had proved to be, and continue to be popular with the residents of Halton. The Service would now like to extend the range of its discretionary services by offering a civil funeral ceremony. There had been a number of enquiries for civil funerals in recent years.

As part of the monitoring procedure for the Registration Service, customers were surveyed on their views on the possibility of offering a non-religious funeral service. Some 70% of those responding either strongly agreed/agreed, 28% had no views, and only 2% strongly disagreed. Surveys on this specific issue were also sent to local ministers and funeral directors. Out of 17 clergy responses, 53% strongly agreed/ agreed and out of three funeral director responses, two strongly agreed/agreed whilst the third contracted a humanist to provide civil funerals and was therefore not interested in a local service provision.

The Safer Halton Policy and Performance Board considered this matter when it met on 17 June 2008 and was supportive of extending discretionary Registration services in this way.

The Council were able to set and levy fees for the ceremonies. Following benchmarking with neighbouring authorities it was suggested that initial fee for a civil funeral on a weekday should be set at £165. A list of prices for funeral services charged by neighbouring authorities and religious ceremonies was circulated to the Committee. It was noted that the proposed fee was lower than that of neighbouring authorities and it was agreed that the fee be set at £180.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Registration Service extending its offer of discretionary services to include civil funeral ceremonies, as outlined in this report be approved.
- (2) the fee of £180 for such a ceremony be approved.

ES14 NATIONALITY CHECKING SERVICE

The Sub Committee received a report of the Strategic Director, Health and Community which sought approval for the Registration Service to enter into partnership with the Home Office to offer the Nationality Checking Service (NCS).

The NCS was a checking and advice service that helps those seeking citizenship make a good quality and complete application which the Home Office's Nationality Group would be able to determine more quickly.

A number of Registration Services already offer the NCS and the arrangements had proven to be a success for all concerned, but demand for the service still exceeds supply and the Home Office were keen to recruit more Council partners. The aim was to create a more cohesive service for citizenship ceremony, involving local authorities across the UK and the Nationality Group of the Home Office.

The NCS was introduced due to the large number of flawed applications received by the Home Office, one consequence of which was that the applicant lost the statutory fee for that application. Such fees were presently £655 for a single person, £735 for a couple and £400 for one or more children. From a financial point of view alone the importance to the applicant of ensuring their application was "right first time" via this checking service was clear.

The report outlined the benefits to the community of the Council becoming an NCS partner, the process for becoming an NCS partner and the suggested initial fees which would be charged for the service.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Registration Service extend its offer of discretionary services to include the Nationality Checking Service, as outlined in this report; and
- (2) the fees proposed for this service in paragraph 3.8 of this report be approved.

PLANNING, TRANSPORTATION, REGENERATION AND RENEWAL PORTFOLIO

ES15 HALTON VILLAGE CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Sub Committee received a report of the Strategic Director, Environment which sought approval for the publication of the Halton Village Conservation Area Appraisal and Management

Plan for public consultation.

Halton Village was designated as a Conservation Area in April 1970. Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 placed a duty on local authorities to formulate and publish proposals for designated conservation areas. It was with this statutory duty in mind that the draft Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan was produced.

Arising from the discussion the Sub Committee requested that a schedule and timetable for completing the Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans for all the conservation areas within the Borough be submitted to the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That an amended report be submitted to the next meeting of the Board including a schedule and timetable, as detailed above, added as an Appendix.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE PORTFOLIO

ES16 REVIEW OF DIRECT PAYMENT HOURLY RATES

The Sub Committee received a report of the Strategic Director, Health and Community which sought approval to the proposed changes to the Direct Payments (DP) Policy and Procedure.

In 2007/8 Halton Borough Council's DP rates were reviewed for new and existing service users and benchmarked against neighbouring Local Authorities.

Options were considered and recommendations proposed to Executive Board Sub Committee on 20th March 2008, to consolidate and simplify the DP rates paid by the Council to an agency or a personal assistant (PA), for new and existing service users. The report outlined the approved rates for 2008/9.

Currently there was no criteria for assessing which level of hourly rate Service Users should be receiving, therefore a review had been carried out and a report produced, which outlined a number of proposed amendments to the DP Policy and Procedure, which included: -

- introducing eligibility criteria to determine the rate at which DPs would be set, based on current good practice, these were outlined in detail within the policy;
- reflecting the changes introduced by the Mental Capacity Act 2005, with additional detail on capacity; and
- reflecting the growth in PA's and, if required, include payroll charges in the set-up costs, and annually

thereafter as a supplement to be paid to the service user if required, when employing a PAs from 1 April 2008.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the changes detailed above, and as set out in the DP Policy and Procedure be approved for public consultation; and
- (2) the findings of the consultation be incorporated into the report, and submitted to a future meeting of the Sub Committee.

ES17 REVIEW OF TRAVEL POLICY & PROCEDURE RELATING TO SOCIAL CARE SERVICES

The Sub Committee received a report of the Strategic Director, Health and Community which sought approval for the proposed changes to the Travel Policy & Procedure for the Health & Community Directorate.

A review of operational practice in 2007 revealed high usage of sole occupancy contracts. The annual cost of sole occupancy contracts at the time was £76,375 for 19 in-borough and 5 out-of-borough services. As a consequence of these high costs, criteria had been developed (Appendix 1) to ensure that a Panel subjected the costs of sole occupancy transport to approval as part of the care assessment process.

Given increased transport usage per day with day centre modernisation, demonstrable improvements in service quality, previous consultation responses and the need to cover a greater proportion of the service/petrol costs and assumed budgetary savings targets, increases to transport charges were approved by full Council on 5th March 2008 and Executive Board Sub Committee on 20th March 2008. The charge for a single journey increased from 50p to £1.00. Executive Board Sub Committee also approved an amendment to the maximum weekly charge, irrespective of the number of journeys undertaken, as follows, to charge a maximum weekly charge of:-

- £10.00, to those not in receipt of the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance
- 50% of the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance (£46.75/week), ie £23.00 per week to those in receipt of it.

On average, 520 service users currently receive transport services from Transport Co-ordination each month. The service continues to change and expand due to the redesign of the provision of day services, which has led to wider dispersal of

daytime activities including gardening, catering, crafts and drama across 14 centres.

A number of changes to the Travel Policy and Procedure had been proposed and covered the following areas, to: -

- promote a range of travel options available to adults over the age of 18 who access social care services:-
 - with an update on the concessionary travel pass which can now be used nationwide,
 - with information on the Blue Badge Scheme,
- introduce a criteria for the single occupancy use of taxis or other LA provided transport,
- place emphasis on reducing air pollution and encourage the use of sustainable resources by promoting the use of public transport,
- include an Eligibility Quick Practice Guide as Appendix 1 to this report, which professionals may detach and take with them on visits.

RESOLVED: That the Board approves the changes above and as outlined in detail in the Policy & Procedure document.

ES18 REVIEW OF VOLUNTEER DRIVER MILEAGE RATES

The Sub Committee received a report of the Strategic Director, Health and Community which set out the current position and the options to amend Volunteer Driver mileage rates.

The Volunteer Driver scheme was a long-running, person-centred service managed by Transport Co-ordination for Adult Social Care and Children's Services. There were 15 volunteer drivers, who drove 177,919 miles in 2007/08. The average number of miles per driver was 11,861.

Following an internal audit of operational practice of the volunteer driver scheme in 2006/7 and to ensure payments were in line with 'Volunteering England's' guidelines for tax-free mileage allowance payments, the mileage rate for all volunteers was reduced from 44.8p to 40p for the first 10,000 miles and 25p per mile thereafter.

In December 2007, the Council's volunteer mileage rate for driving above 10,000 miles was increased from the Inland Revenue approved mileage rate of 25p to 33.5p. The volunteer, if driving above 10,000 miles, should now declare payments made by the Council and their expenses to the Inland Revenue, who would then determine the volunteer's tax liability. Eleven volunteers stopped driving in 2007/08, 6 because of the rising cost of fuel/combined mileage rates and 5 for personal reasons.

Using information from the AA, the present rates of 40p for less than 10,000 miles and 33.5p above 10,000 miles, would allow the driver to recover their costs of motoring for a car costing under £10,000. However, if a volunteer drove a car costing more than £10,000 when new, the costs of motoring would not be recovered.

Any increase above these rates would lead to a "taxable profit" in the Inland Revenue's eyes with tax potentially being paid by the driver or the driver having to confirm their true cost of motoring.

By comparing Halton's rates against neighbouring local authorities responses to an email survey conducted by Transport Co-ordination, this revealed that the proposed option 2, as set out below, would be in line with payment rates of neighbouring and other Local Authorities.

The following options were considered:-

Option 1

Continue paying all volunteers the present mileage rates of 40p up to 10,000 miles and 33.5p above 10,000 miles or revert to the Inland Revenue Mileage approved rate of 25p above 10,000 miles.

This could lead to a loss of volunteers but would reduce costs.

Option 2

Pay volunteers a flat mileage rate of 40p.

Volunteers would be more inclined to drive over 10,000 miles as their costs would be covered, although they would have to submit details of the income and all motoring expenses to the Inland Revenue. Volunteer Drivers would need to be advised of their obligations in respect of a tax with a letter issued, as for the APS service.

The cost would be an additional £5550 if 7 of the existing drivers continued to drive above 10,000 miles.

Option 3

Pay volunteers a rate above 40p per mile or a salary for driving their own car on a casual basis.

If volunteers received payments which attracted income tax, they might need to licence their cars as a private hire vehicle. They

would have to declare all earnings as a self-employed person and could no longer claim that they were “volunteer” drivers.

Option 4

Employ volunteers as casual drivers using HBC fleet vehicles.

It may be necessary to purchase additional vehicles if the current fleet could not meet demand. The volunteer would become an employee of HBC. This would be at a considerable additional cost and, on a value for money basis, more costly than current arrangements.

Of the above, option 2 struck the best balance between appropriate remuneration, retaining volunteers and ease of process. In addition, the volunteer driver mileage rate would be subject to quarterly review, given that the current price of fuel would fluctuate. Benchmark information from the AA or Inland Revenue would be used to set the rate.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) Option 2, mileage rates for volunteer drivers be increased from 33.5p to 40p per mile, when driving in excess of 10,000 miles be approved; and
- (2) the Strategic Director - Health & Community, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Health & Social Care, be authorised to review and amend the volunteer driver mileage rate and arrangements having regard to the actual costs of motoring.

CORPORATE SERVICES PORTFOLIO

ES19 TREASURY MANAGEMENT 2008/09 1ST QUARTER: APRIL-JUNE

The Sub Committee received a report of the Operational Director, Financial Services which updated the Sub Committee about the activities undertaken on the money market, as required by the Treasury Management Policy.

The Sub Committee was advised that the base rate fell from 5.25% to 5.00% on 10th April 2008 and that this was the fourth consecutive cut in the base rate. This meant that the Monetary Policy Committee was facing a testing period. With inflation rising and the economy slowing, there was little room to manoeuvre with interest rates.

The Sub Committee was also advised that longer rates firmed

up during the period and were never attractive enough for the authority to consider new borrowing and the PWLB rates were for “lower quota” entitlements.

Furthermore the turnover during period, as shown in the table below:

	No. Of Deals Struck	Turnover £m
Short Term Borrowing	5	10.40
Short Term Investments	42	58.75

It was noted that the turnover on investments was relatively low, reflecting the fixture of the bulk of the Council’s investments into fixed rate, fixed term deals before Christmas in anticipation of rates falling.

The Sub Committee was informed of the position at Month End, as detailed below;

	April £m	May £m	June £m
Short Term Borrowing	1.00	NIL	2.50
Short Term Investments	41.20	48.25	45.20

It was noted that the authority’s cash flow through the period was positive, which was normal for the early part of the financial year as grant and council tax income was received.

The Sub Committee was informed of the forecast income and outturn for the quarter was as follows:

	Cumulative Budget £'000	Cumulative Actual £'000	Cumulative Target Rate %	Cumulative Actual Rate %
Quarter 1	458	674	5.08	5.87
Quarter 2	936	0	0.00	0.00
Quarter 3	1,331	0	0.00	0.00
Quarter 4	1,700	0	0.00	0.00

It was noted that the target income was exceeded due to the excellent rate of interest currently being earned on investments. By

locking investments in for slightly longer periods last year, the investment rate was secure well into the current year.

It was noted that the authority did not borrow any new long term money. Three longer investment deals (greater than 12 months) had been undertaken during the period all for £2.5m. They were placed at 6.20%, 6.52% and 6.56%.

The Sub Committee was advised of the actions taken in relation to policy guidelines

- Interest Rate Exposure was complied with;
- Approved Counterparty List – following various reports from the credit rating agencies, the authority had been particularly careful in placing money into investments, especially for those deals of longer duration. During the quarter a one year investment was made with Derbyshire Building Society which meant that the limit for funds lent (limit £2.5m actual £5m) for more than three months with that organisation was exceeded for 14 days. It was felt that the Derbyshire was the best counterparty on the day offering the particular rate which was being sought. This decision reflects the difficulty in finding a secure place for money being placed into the market for longer periods. The period of exposure had now lapsed and the current lending to this organisation was back within the set limits;
- Borrowing Instruments was complied with; and
- Prudential Indicators were complied with:
 - Operational Boundary for external debt;
 - Upper limit on interest rate exposure on fixed rate debt;
 - Upper limit on interest rate exposure on variable rate debt;
 - Maturity structure of borrowing as a percentage of fixed rate borrowing;
 - Total principal sums invested for periods longer than 364 days;
 - Maturity Structure of New Fixed rate Borrowing during 2005/06.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

MINUTES ISSUED: 1st August 2008

CALL IN: 8th August 2008

Any matter decided by the Executive Board Sub Committee may be called in no later than 8th August 2008.

Meeting ended at 12.00 p.m.