

Corporate Policy and Performance Board– Priority Based Monitoring Report Q3

Reporting Period: 01st October – 31st December 2023

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of issues and progress against key service objectives/milestones and performance targets, during the third quarter of 2023/24 for service areas within the remit of the Corporate Policy and Performance Board.
- 1.2 It covers key priorities for development or improvement in the various functional areas reporting to the Board in relation to the Council's priority of Corporate Effectiveness and Business Efficiency i.e.:
 - Financial Services
 - Operational HR Division, Chief Executives Delivery Unit
 - ICT Infrastructure
 - Legal and Democracy
 - Catering, Stadium and Registration Services
 - Property Services
- 1.3 The way in which traffic light symbols have been used to reflect progress to date is explained within Section 8 of this report.

2.0 Key Developments

- 2.1 There have been a number of developments during the period which include:-

Financial Services

2.2 Benefits Division

Processing Times

At 31 December 2023 processing times for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction were as follows: new claims 23.61 days and changes in circumstances 15.46 days.

Department for Works and Pensions – real time information

With effect from 22 January 2024 the Benefits Service will commence providing the DWP with real time information with regards to housing benefit new claims and changes in circumstances. Modifications have been made to the Benefit Service's computer system and an automated link established with the DWP's system. This information was transferred on a monthly basis to the DWP, but now claimant activity can be monitored more effectively, and the Benefit Service does not have to undertake the monthly job of preparing a file to send to the DWP.

Raising Local Housing Allowance Rates

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates have been frozen for several years, however the Chancellor announced in his December 2023 statement that LHA rates in Great Britain will be raised to the 30th percentile of local market rents from April 2024 for the next financial year. The Secretary of State has committed to review the LHA rates annually. LHA rates are used to calculate housing benefit and housing support in Universal Credit for tenants renting from private landlords. The new LHA rates will be published at the end of January 2024.

2.3 Audit, Procurement and Operational Finance Division

Supplier Invoice Processing Performance

At the end of Quarter 3, 91.15% of all supplier invoices paid in 2023/24 had been settled within 30 days. This represents an improvement on 2022/23 performance despite the Purchase to Pay team operating at reduced capacity throughout the current financial year.

Early Payment Scheme

Since August 2022, the Council has operated its early payment scheme for supplier invoices without any external support. This has ensured that any rebate generated by the accelerated payment of invoices is retained in full by the Council.

The amount of rebate achieved and retained by the Council to the end of quarter 3 is £82,555.

Corporate Card Programme

The Council operates a corporate card programme and generates an income stream in the form of a rebate based on the level of spend via corporate cards. To maximise rebate, a strategy has been adopted to pay supplier invoices by card where suppliers have the facilities to receive card payments and are happy to do so.

This approach continues to be successful and the Council's card provider has recently confirmed that the Council is to receive rebate income of £64,512 in 2023/24. This is based on card spending for the period December 2022 to June 2023.

In July 2023, the Council entered into a new agreement with its card provider securing a higher rate of rebate, which will be applied to card spend incurred during the period July 2023 to June 2024. Rebate achieved to the end of December for the current rebate period currently stands at £49,274.

Insurance tender

The Council is currently retendering a range of insurance policies which are due to expire on 31 March 2024. The Council's Procurement team and insurance broker are supporting the tender process, which is being undertaken using a Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation framework agreement. There are five separate lots covering:

- Property
- Computer
- Combined Liability
- Motor
- Engineering and Inspection

The closing date for tenders is 16 February 2024. The contract awards for each lot are due to be confirmed on 22 March 2024.

External assessment of Internal Audit

The Council's internal audit arrangements have recently been externally assessed through a peer review process. The purpose of the assessment was to determine whether the arrangements are compliant with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, which represents professional standards for internal audit. It is a requirement that the Council's internal audit arrangements must be externally assessed against the standards at least once every five years.

The assessment involved interviews with key stakeholders, such as the Chair of the Audit and Governance Board, the Chief Executive, and members of the Council's Management Team. The initial feedback received from the review team is positive and confirms that the Council's arrangements are compliant with professional standards. A report confirming this will be received and presented to a future meeting of the Audit and Governance Board.

2.4 Revenues and Financial Management Division

2023/24 Quarter 2 Financial Monitoring

For the financial year to 30 September 2023, overall Council operational net spending was £57.1m against a budget of £53.5m, resulting in an overspend position to date against budget of £3.6m. The forecast position for the year to 31 March 2024 was an estimated overspend of £8.1m.

Capital spending at 30 September 2023 totalled £20.1m, which is 90% of the planned spending of £22.3m at this stage. This represents 30% of the total Capital Programme of £67.5m (which assumes a 20% slippage between years).

The updated financial forecast and picture of net spending to 31 December 2023 will be reported to Executive Board on 22 February 2024.

2022/23 Statement of Accounts

The draft version of the 2022/23 Statement was published on the Council's website on Wednesday 04 July 2023. Over the past quarter the Council's external auditor Grant Thornton UK LLP has continued with the audit of the accounts and Value for Money Assessment, the aim being to finalise the audit by mid-February and report the Audit Findings Report to the Audit & Governance Board on 20 March 2024.

Council Tax and Business Rate Collection

Council tax collection for the year to 31 December 2023 is 80.26%, down 0.43% on this point last year. Cash collection for the year to date is £63.2m, this includes £1.8m collected in relation to previous year debt.

Business rates collection for the first half of the year is 82.25%, up by 0.91% on this point last year. Cash collected for the year to date is £50.2m, this includes £0.9m collected in relation to previous year debt.

Local Government Finance Settlement 2024/25

On 18 December 2023, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), published the 2024/25 provisional local government finance settlement.

The settlement provided was broadly in line with expectations set-out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy, reported to Executive Board in November 2023. The one major difference being a significant reduction in Service Grant, the level of grant dropped from £1.460m to £0.230m, a reduction of £1.230m or 84%. No explanation was provided for the reduction in grant.

2024/25 Core Spending Power for Halton is £148.215m, a cash increase of £9.155m (6.6%) on 2023/24 figures. The Core Spending Power which assumes a maximum increase to council tax levels and assumptions on growth against business rates and the council tax base is considered to be lower than growth required to remain in line with the Council's cost base.

Core Spending Power for 2024/25 represents a real term reduction on 2010/11 funding levels of £53.7m or 26.6%, or £919.02 per dwelling.

The settlement confirmed a cap of 3% be applied to council tax increases at which point a local referendum must be held and an ASC precept of 2%.

Financial Management submitted a Council response to the provisional settlement consultation and contributed to responses by Sigoma and the Liverpool City Region.

2.5 Operational HR Division, Chief Executives Delivery Unit

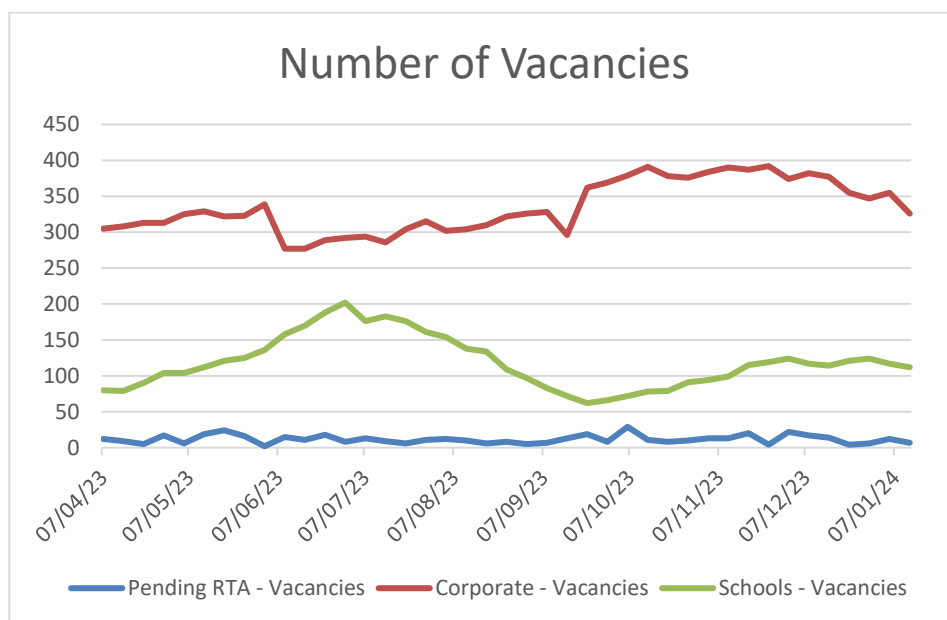
The new HR Business Partnering Model went live on 1st December 2023. Senior Managers were engaged, informed and the Business Partners have started to build the working relationships within their respective directorates, including attending Senior Management Meetings.

Three services within the HR Operations Division (Resourcing & Recruitment, Payroll & Pensions and Business Partnering) remain under significant pressure in the current year. Additional demand persists across all areas. The new service configuration of HR Operations (Resourcing & Recruitment, Payroll & Pensions and HR Business Partnering, Health and Safety) is working collaboratively to deliver what the wider Council now requires. This is informed by work within the Transformation programme together with business as usual.

The 2023/2024 pay award was resolved nationally and despite significant challenges in terms of volume and timescales, the pay and pensions service successfully delivered the processing of the pay award in a shortened period of time for November 2023 pay.

Agency usage remains high, activity has taken place to on-board all care homes on to the Matrix contract to reduce off contract agency spend. Although there are some agencies still in the process of on boarding, the care homes had training to use the on-contract arrangements in the first instance.

Recruitment demand remains consistently high, with the annual school recruitment push at an end we are seeing a significant upswing in demand for the processing of corporate vacancies, as can be seen in the graph below (*please note that the date format shows the month first*).



At the time of writing, there are 333 Council vacancies in the recruitment workflow inclusive of usual recruitment, 'Adults Always On', 'Indeed', and 124 school vacancies in progress.

Difficult labour market conditions remain to bring barriers in the recruiting and resourcing of many service areas across the organisation. Resourcing workflows remain continuously under review to address the consistent issue. A trial was carried for the 'Accelerated Growth' campaign to advertise on different recruitment platforms such total jobs with a quick turnaround in recruitment adapting to the labour market, however this proved unsuccessful with only 1 vacancy being offered.

The Communications and Marketing service continues to support a range of organisational initiatives, including the 'Big Conversation' and Reimagine Halton Transformation Programme.

The service has introduced a new email marketing platform to support the effective delivery of campaigns. A review of the Council's residents newsletter, Inside Halton is also underway.

2.6 ICT and Administration

Quarter three was a considerably busy period for all of the teams across the Support Services and IT divisions.

The completion of the decentralisation of the Administrative Shared Service into the departments was a considerable task but one that was undertaken compassionately and quickly in line with the December 1st deadline to minimise the impact upon the staff within the service.

Training was given and offered to the recipient departments, they are now fully responsible for the monitoring and development of their own administrative staff, along with all HR and Welfare tasks. The central team has now been disbanded with only one redundancy of a team leader and the loss of a further five team leaders to other organisations and 2 internal posts.

The IT teams continue to develop and create the new M365 platforms with the highly successful deployment of the new Dell Laptop devices into trial with over 150 users spread across the authority. The trial is aimed at testing a large number of software packages and user scenarios before the imminent full release of devices to all users over the coming months.

The trial so far has received extremely positive feedback allowing for plans to be brought forward for the wider release. The only hinderance at the moment is physical resource to deploy en-mass as the team is reduced to only 2 senior technicians able to deliver the training currently whilst maintaining other duties. The department as with many others is subject to a number of vacancies – all vacancies will be advertised externally, and the success will be reported back within Q4.

The transformation programme associated with the department linked to the "Customer Journey" programme of work has started to move forward at a pace now the completion of the admin workstream has been agreed and resource can be focused upon the considerable task ahead given the organisational demand for technology.

This has included the development of the Digital Halton Strategy covering the objectives and the technical strategies for this three-year objective.

2.7 Legal and Democracy

The Legal Team has experienced considerate frustration in its attempt to recruit to vacant Solicitor posts. Offers were made to two candidates for posts in the Social Care & Education team, but they were declined – in once case after a number of weeks. Both posts have been advertised twice.

There have also been problems recruiting to a temporary Solicitor post dealing with Accelerated Growth Fund work, and this also remains vacant.

The structure of the Legal team will be looked at as part of the transformation programme, to attempt to address these issues and ensure that there is as full a staff complement as possible.

2.8 Catering - School Meals

As a result of schools being notified that from the 31 March 2025 Halton will no longer be providing a catering provision, we have seen a number of schools make enquiries regarding TUPE transfer to alternative catering providers.

Two schools left Halton Catering service in November 2023 with a schedule 7 to start with another catering provider by the start of January 2024.

2.9 Stadium

The stadium management team continue to engage with the Transformation team in reimagining the Stadium, its commercial viability and sustainability.

Key performances indicators continue to be monitored and developed to ensure appropriate data is gathered. These are focused on stadium usage/occupancy and customer satisfaction. Data received to date (including Q2) on the customer satisfaction surveys reads as follows.

- 89% of returns rated the stadium in terms of 'Quality of Venue' between 4 and 5 stars.
- 93% of returns rated the stadium in terms of 'Quality of Catering' between 4 and 5 stars.
- 89% of returns said they would likely or very likely use the stadium again.
- 84% of customers would likely or very likely recommend the stadium to others.

(1 star being very poor and 5 stars being excellent)

Overall, 79% of customers rated the stadium very good or excellent.

Throughout Q2 and Q3 a social media campaign was launched with the aim of increasing the Stadiums social media following and interaction rates across all platforms, this took the form of a "free event ticket giveaway" which seen Local Chart-topping band The Acoustic Odds alongside local bands perform in front of a capacity audience. This campaign achieved its main aim and we saw growth across all platforms helping to raise awareness of the Stadium and its offering to a wider audience.

The Stadium developed a new way approach to the hosting of live events and established a new partnership between HBC, Widnes Vikings and Giggleshack (local promoter), this allowed the Stadium to host an event with a reduced financial risk. This new approach proved successful, and the event seen a sell-out audience attend. The success of this event has resulted in a positive partnership to move forward with, and further dates have been booked.

Stadium & Catering (New Proposed Division)

Management presented the new proposed Stadium & Catering Division to Steering Group on Thursday 23 December 2023, and opened consultation with staff on Monday 4 December 2023 which could result in significant savings to the service areas.

2.10 Registration Services

The Registration Service has updated its websites: www.halton.gov.uk/registration and www.weddingsinhalton.co.uk;

The Registration Service has completed the recruitment and selection process for a replacement Senior Registration Officer.

The Registration Service has completed the recruitment process with for two Casual Civil Ceremonies Celebrants – with interviews taking place in January 2024.

The Registration Service has successfully completed an accurate and reconciled stocktake of all certificate and secure stationery stock as of 31st December 2023.

2.11 Property Services (Operations)

St Patrick's Nursing Home Redevelopment

New 16 bed extension plus refurbishment work to the remaining accommodation. Works planned to be carried out in phases with an estimated works cost of £2.6m. Planning application submitted. A bid has been submitted to the Public Sector Decarbonisation scheme in order to obtain funds to carry out various decarbonisation works, outcome of the bid anticipated by the end of January. Hoping to commence work on site in April.

St Luke's Nursing Home Refurbishment

Refurbishment of existing accommodation in 4 phases, estimated works cost of £1.1m. A bid has been submitted to the Public Sector Decarbonisation scheme in order to obtain funds to carry out various decarbonisation works, outcome of the bid anticipated by the end of January. Hoping to commence work on site in Spring.

Proposed New Leisure Centre Moor Lane

The contract start date was 9th January 2023, works are progressing well and are on programme and on budget, the contractual completion date is 3rd February 2025.

Camden Buildings, High Street- refurb to create digital/creative hub (57-59)

Town Deal funding was obtained in October 2022, the work has been tendered and the final evaluation of the tenders is being undertaken. A start on site is anticipated prior to the end of February. An initial soft strip together with some enabling works has now been completed this being required ahead of the main works starting on site.

Camden Buildings, High Street- refurb to create digital/creative hub (63-65)

Town Deal funding was obtained in October 2022, RIBA stage 3 is completed and early in the new year it is anticipated RIBA stage 4 will start.

Brookvale Rec- Proposed Refurbishment works

A feasibility study has been received ; Consideration in respect of the most appropriate course of action is currently being considered by the Sports Development team.

Pickering Pastures- Proposed new pavilion building

New Build Pavilion, budget estimate is £520k. Executive board approval has been obtained. Works are now being progressed in respect of site surveys, ground investigations and preparing the planning application, following which tender documents will be prepared. Planned start on site late spring/early summer 2024 with completion prior to year end.

Cavendish School - 2 class extension

Works are on site and progressing well, anticipated completion is February 2024.

The Brindley- Proposed extension

Approval to the Town Deal funding was obtained in October 2022, following which design development has now progressed through RIBA stage 4. The preferred option has been agreed with a budget cost estimate of £5.6m. Planning approval has been obtained. The project is out to tender via the Chest with a return date of January 19th, following evaluation it is hoped site works will start by April 2024.

Runcorn Library redevelopment

Design development works ongoing to create an NHS Health & Education hub. RIBA stage 3 is completed and the next stage RIBA stage 4 is due to start, the budget cost is £1.8m.

Elite House- Redevelopment

Approval to the Town Deal funding was obtained in October 2022. Work to secure an operator is being led by Regeneration and once chosen they will feed into the design process. The Town Deal funding is insufficient to carry out the current desired scheme and there is a bid to the combined Authority for additional funding. This can only be progressed however once an operator is in place and the design developed.

Changing Places Facilities

The 3 Changing Places facilities, at Victoria Park, Halton Lea Library and the Stadium are all now complete, there are a few minor snags to complete at the Victoria Park facility. We have still to get all venues registered with Changing Places this will be undertaken in the New Year, following which all will be available for use.

Unit 10 Refurbishment

Works are complete other than the gas main by Cadent, though this has not affected handover of the internal work which is now complete. and Tarmac have now taken occupation following their own fit out work their own fit out.

Decarbonisation Projects

2 funding bids were submitted in November for decarbonisations works. These covered works at both St Pat's and St Luke's care homes as previously mentioned, together with schemes at Runcorn Town Hall, Kingsway Learning Centre and Picow Farm depot, all with the intension of electrifying the heat and hot water provision and moving away from gas. The outcome of the bids will not be known until the end of January 2024.

Education maintenance programme 2023/24

The 2023/24 Education maintenance programme was approved by Council in March. The programme consists of 13 separate projects with an estimated cost of circa £780k. The majority of the projects are now complete with only 3 projects outstanding, all of which will be completed by year end.

Corporate Maintenance programme 2023/24

The 2023/24 Corporate maintenance programme was approved by the Asset Management Working Group. Circa 20 projects on the list, some now complete others at various stages of progress, the intension being all funding will be expended by year end.

Education SEMH Resource base projects

There are 6 schools where we are upgrading the facilities to create Social, Emotional & Mental Health (SEMH) resource bases for both KS1 & KS2 groups. 4 of the projects are now complete, at Oakfield, Victoria Road, Astmoor and Westfield Primaries, works at Woodside primary are ongoing, we are awaiting instruction in respect of Ditton Primary.

3.0 Emerging Issues

3.1 A number of emerging issues have been identified during the period that will impact upon the work of services including:-

3.2 Finance - Benefits Division

Universal Credit – Managed Migration

In December 2023, the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) informed all local authorities that during 2024/25 all people receiving legacy benefits, which includes Tax Credits, Employment Support Allowance, Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance (income based), and Housing Benefit will be migrated to Universal Credit.

The DWP plan to commence issuing Migration Notices to working age benefit claimants sequentially starting with Income Support (April–June), Employment Support Allowance with Child tax credits (July – September) and Jobseekers Allowance (September). If a Housing Benefit customer is receiving one of these benefits, they will receive a Migration Notice. From April the DWP will also invite tax credits claimants with Housing Benefit and then Housing Benefit (only) customers to move.

The DWP have indicated that in early 2024 they will be providing councils with more detail on the national roll out plan, and the volumes of Housing Benefit customers involved for individual local authority caseloads.

The Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) statistics indicate at 9th November 2023 there were 16,332 people within Halton claiming Universal Credit. The table below shows the Universal Credit caseload in Halton on a quarterly basis over the past 19 months.

Universal Credit caseload	
Date	Caseload
1 st April 2022	15,262
30 th June 2022	15,283
30 th September 2022	15,533
31 st December 2022	15,581
31 st March 2023	15,817
11 th May 2023	15,969
8 th June 2023	16,057
13 th July 2023	16,072
10 th August 2023	16,138
9 th November 2023	16,332

3.3 Audit, Procurement and Operational Finance Division

The Procurement Bill

The Procurement Bill, which will reform the UK’s public sector procurement rules, received Royal Assent in October 2023. In early 2024 secondary legislation (regulations) will be laid to bring some elements of the Bill and the wider regime into effect.

The Cabinet Office is now working on implementation and ensuring readiness for the new regime, and further guidance and communications materials will be issued over the coming months. A series of learning and development options will also be available to stakeholders to support implementation. Cabinet Office has also confirmed that there will also be a six-month notice period once all the legislation is finalised. This is intended to provide authorities and suppliers time to prepare.

The Act will allow greater flexibility to contracting authorities in terms of procurement procedures. For example, contracting authorities will be able to decide whether to use an ‘open procedure’ or another kind of competitive procedure of their choice, known as a ‘competitive flexible procedure’:

- Open procedure - A single stage tendering procedure, without restriction on who can submit tenders
- Competitive flexible procedure - This will allow contracting authorities the opportunity to design their own procedures, provided that they are appropriate to the procurement in question

It is important to note that the new legal framework will only apply to the Council's procurement activity that exceeds the following thresholds:

Contract Type	Threshold from 1 January 2024
Public Works Contracts	£5,372,609
Supplies and Services	£214,904
'Light Touch Regime' Services	£663,540

Existing procurement legislation will apply until the new regime goes live and will also continue to apply to procurements started under the old rules. Procurement below the above thresholds will continue to be governed by the Council's Procurement Standing Orders.

3.4 Revenues and Financial Management Division

Call for views on new local authority capital flexibilities

On 18 December, the Secretary of State for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) announced a call for views inviting local authorities, sector representatives and other stakeholders to provide views on a set of options with respect to capital flexibilities and borrowing, to be managed locally, that could be used to encourage and enable local authorities to invest in ways that reduce the cost of service delivery and provide more local levers to manage financial resources. The proposals are summarised as follows:

- Extending capitalisation flexibilities to include a wider set of eligible costs, in particular general revenue costs.
- Extending the flexible use of capital receipts to allow authorities to borrow for the revenue costs of invest-to-save projects.
- Allowing additional flexibilities for the use of the proceeds of selling investment assets.
- Introducing a reduced interest rate for borrowing from the Public Works Loans Board for invest-to-save projects.

Financial Management are finalising a Council response to the call for views which will be submitted by 31 January 2024.

3.5 Operational HR Division, Chief Executives Delivery Unit

Although the 2023/24 pay award was resolved and processed, it should be noted that the level of pay increase will put extreme pressure on the Council budget.

Use of agency workers remains consistently high in the Council, particularly in Adults and Children's Services where labour market conditions continue to be extremely tight and competitive. This is not restricted to Halton, but the national service and profession skill shortages for care and social care sector. This also correlates to a consistently high number of vacancies (see recruitment update in Key Developments above).

A dedicated workstream within the Transformation Programme continues to be focused on this business issue, adding challenge and capacity to operational service areas to seek solutions to bring usage and associated spend down, the 'indeed' campaign mentioned above being one, the on boarding of the care homes onto Matrix being another to reduce 'off-contract' spend.

3.6 ICT

Digital Transformation enablers delivered in 2022/23:

- Commissioned 137 Days of focused ongoing engineering support to cross-train and co-develop with key members of staff across 30 statemented enabling project areas.
- Re-training of key staffing to deliver within and manage cloud rather than on-premise – linked to the retention and development of on-premise BAU support.
- Delivered the Halton Office 365 platform in full – November 2023.
- Established user management through Azure AAD.
- User Data into the Cloud – linked to SharePoint Online and OneDrive
- Initiated the migration away from legacy non-supported application.
- Delivered a Zero Touch device strategy linked to a 5 Year Contracted Device management solution for Laptop and Mobile.
- Delivered Microsoft Security Standards and Policies
- Delivered and maintained compliance with DLUHC, NCSC, security standards.
- Managed Licencing model in place, budget management and re-charge systems developed.
- Detailed User and Management Policies Developed.
- Azure Server management platform commissioned and aligned with Data Centre/Property Strategy.
- Microsoft Virtual Desktop AVD deployed and standardised build ready for use case development.
- VMWare re-design and application deployment solutions in place for legacy applications that will not work within the cloud environment – 18-month deadline for removal of this unsupported platform allowing for extended timescales for departments to upgrade application requirements.
- Teams Telephony in place and connected to Microsoft delivering external voice in line with 365/Device roll-out.
- Structured delivery of the Azure Platform Design, and management strategies for the new environment.
- Intune cloud application deployment and Application Centre in place.
- Initiated the design and pre-development for Zero Trust single tier network.
- Initiated printing review linked to the RMU facility.
- Digitised postal services across the authority.
- Vision in place for the re-organisation of support teams and staffing within the technology areas, linked to a developing strategy for the Customer Services areas and supporting digital platforms – CRM, Call Centre, Web, Ai.

3.7 Legal and Democracy

As in previous quarters, demands on the Legal team continue to increase, particularly in the Children's Social Care area and work continues to increase in the Planning and Environmental fields.

Efforts to recruit continue alongside the ongoing transformation work.

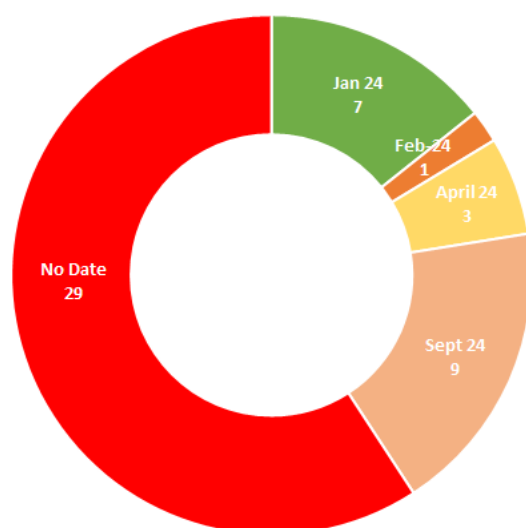
Work will begin in Quarter 4 on the annual review of the Constitution, and preparation for the forthcoming elections are well in hand.

3.8 Catering - School Meals

The school meals management where concerned some schools had made little or no progress in sourcing a new catering provider.

Management contacted all remaining schools for an update and expected transfer date. Please see below.

School Meals Catering Transfer Status



On receipt of the data from schools it was concerning that 29 schools could not give an expected transfer date. To assist schools Management made contact with the DfE who have offered a free procurement service to HBC schools to help ease this burden and ensure they make the right informed decisions. A webinar is scheduled with interested schools and the school meals management on 18/01/24.

Recruitment and retention have still been causing issues, however we have not had to close any kitchens or reduce the service.

3.9 Stadium

Contractual Negotiations

- Widnes FC for season 2024/25
- Halton Table Tennis
- DCBL Sponsorship complete – new 3-year deal

Atlas Security (Term Contractor)

The Stadium management team have continued to raise concerns over recent months. These have been highlighted directly with the Account Manager from Atlas as a risk and options are being considered regarding future arrangements.

3.10 Registration Services

The Registration Service continues to work with HBC ITC Service's, HBC Income and Stopford (an external Registration Management System provider) - to technically develop and allow online appointments for Births, Deaths, Marriage and Civil Partnerships. This use of automation in improving the customers journey is aligned with the "Reimagining Halton" transformation agenda.

From the end of February, the Registration Service will have a vacancy for a Senior Registration Officer, following the retirement of the existing post holder. This vacancy which will hopefully be advertised during January 2024.

3.11 Property Services (Operations)

Protect Duty

The 'Protect Duty', more commonly known as Martyn's Law is due to come in to force later in the year. The legislation will place a requirement on those responsible for certain publicly accessible buildings, locations and venues to consider the threat from terrorism and to implement appropriate and proportionate mitigation measures. It will mainly focus on the requirement to undertake risk assessments of the various locations following which plans must be put in place in respect of implementing appropriate mitigation measures. The impact of this is that it may likely mean the introduction of measures such as public address voice alarm (PAVA) systems in certain venues where not already installed together with the enhancement of other factors such as street furniture, e.g. bollards, to prevent vehicular access to certain areas.

Accommodation review

With the new agile approach to working since the COVID pandemic, i.e. with office based staff only needing to be in the office for a minimum of 40% of the time, subject to service requirements, our main office accommodation is now significantly underutilised which gives us an opportunity to rationalise our office bases. Following on from a report produced in January 2023 in to our accommodation, a Member working group has been set up to look at the various options available to us in respect of rationalising our accommodation. Feasibility work is ongoing in respect of various options, this work should be complete by the end of January following which the Member working group will meet to discuss the various options, the intention being that recommendations will be put forward to ensure the space is used more effectively in the future and to help generate revenue savings. Future updates will be given as this work progresses.

Carbon emission targets

Halton's Climate Change Action Plan has set a target for the Council's own carbon emissions to reach net zero by 2040 in line with the Liverpool City region. Two bids were submitted in November to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS), the first covering St Luke's and St Pat's care homes the second covering, Runcorn Town Hall, Kingsway Learning Centre and Picow Farm depot. It is anticipated that the outcome of the bids will be announced prior to the end of January.

4.0 High Priority Equality Actions

- 4.1** Equality issues continue to form a routine element of the Council's business planning and operational decision making processes. Additionally the Council must have evidence to demonstrate compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which came into force in April 2011.
- 4.2** The Council's latest annual progress report in relation to the achievement of its equality objectives is published on the Council website and is available via:

<http://www4.halton.gov.uk/Pages/councildemocracy/Equality-and-Diversity.aspx>



5.0 Performance Overview

- 5.1 The following information provides a synopsis of progress for both milestones and performance indicators across the key business areas that have been identified by the Directorate.
- 5.2 It should be noted that given the significant and unrelenting downward financial pressures faced by the Council there is a requirement for Departments to make continuous in-year adjustments to the allocation of resources in order to ensure that the Council maintains a balanced budget.
- 5.3 Whilst every effort continues to be made to minimise any negative impact of such arrangements upon service delivery they may inevitably result in a delay in the delivery of some of the objectives and targets contained within this report.


Financial Management



Key Objectives / milestones

Ref	Objective
FS 01	Set the Revenue Budget, Capital Programme and Recommend Council Tax.


Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
Report 2024-27 Medium Term Financial Strategy to Executive Board - November 2023.		Medium Term Financial Strategy reported to Executive Board in November 2023.
Report 2024/25 revenue budget, capital programme and council tax to Council - March 2024.		On target to report 2024/25 revenue budget, capital programme and council tax to Council - March 2024.

Ref	Objective
FS 02	To effect financial prudence by assisting managers to control their budgets by monitoring spending and providing timely and accurate financial reports.


Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
Provide monthly financial reports to budget holders within 8 days of month end.		Reports all issued on schedule to date.

Provide quarterly financial monitoring reports to Operational Directors for inclusion in Performance Monitoring Reports.		Quarter 3 reports are in the process of being finalised and will be shared with Operational Directors for inclusion in Performance Monitoring Reports.
Provide quarterly monitoring and forecasting reports on the overall budget to Executive Board.		Quarter 3 monitoring report on the overall budget will go to Executive Board on 22 February 2024



Ref	Objective
FS 03	Provide for public accountability by reporting the Council's stewardship of public funds and its financial performance in the use of resources by preparing the statutory Statement of Accounts in accordance with the latest accounting standards.

Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
Publish the Statement of Accounts following external audit and the Annual Governance Statement by 30th September 2023.		The draft accounts were published and shared with the External Auditor on 04 July 2023. The audit of accounts commenced at the start of October and now expected to be finalised by mid-February. Audit Findings Report is expected to be reported to Audit & Governance Board in March 2024.









Ref	Objective
FS 04	Make best use of cash resources available to the Council and meet its statutory responsibility by setting, implementing and monitoring the Treasury Management Policy.





Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
Establish Treasury Management Policy and report to Council - March 2023.		Treasury Management Policy reported to Council on 08 March 2023
Provide monitoring reports to Executive Board on a bi-annual basis.		Treasury Management update to 30 September 2023 reported to Executive Board 16 November 2023.

Ref	Objective
FS 05	Ensure that the Capital Programme is affordable, prudent, and sustainable by setting and monitoring prudential borrowing indicators.

Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
Establish and report prudential indicators to Council - March 2023.		Prudential indicators reported to Council on 08 March 2023.
Provide monitoring reports to the Executive Board on a bi-annual basis.		Position to 30 September 2023 reported to Executive Board 16 November 2023.

Key Performance Indicators


Ref	Description	Actual 2022/23	Target 2023/24	Q3 Position	Current Progress	Direction of Travel	Supporting Commentary
FS LI 01	Receive an unqualified external audit opinion on the accounts	Yes	Awaited			NA	External audit expected to provide audit opinion in March 2024.
FS LI 02	Receive an unqualified VFM opinion from the Council's External Auditor	Yes	Awaited			NA	External audit not expected to provide VFM opinion until March 2024
FS LI 03	Proportion of Council Tax that was due that was collected	94.14%	94.25%				This is down by 0.43% on the same point last year.
FS LI 04	The percentage of Business Rates which should have been received during the year that were received	96.18%	97.50%				This is up by 0.91% on the same point last year.
FS LI 05	Average time for processing new claims (Housing Benefit & Council Tax Reduction)	23.71	18	23.61			Although the target will not be achieved, Q3 performance has improved compared to Q1 and Q2.



Ref	Description	Actual 2022/23	Target 2023/24	Q3 Position	Current Progress	Direction of Travel	Supporting Commentary
FS LI 06	Average time for processing notifications of changes in circumstances	9.55	8	15.46			Although the target will not be achieved, Q3 performance has improved compared to Q1 and Q2.
FSLI 07	Proportion of all supplier invoices paid within 30 days (including disputed invoices)	91.13%	92.0%	91.15%			Although payment performance is slightly behind target, there is a marginal improvement when compared to 2022/23

Operational HR Division, Chief Executives Delivery Unit



Key Objectives / milestones

Ref	Objective
CXDU 01	To enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of corporate training opportunities through the design and implementation of appropriate learning interventions, to include the development of bespoke Learning & Development offerings to individual service areas.


Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
Promote and take forward the delivery of actions identified within the Organisational Development Strategy September 2023		The strategy has been reviewed, tailored accordingly, and is now aligned with the Transformation Programme requirements
Regular engagement with Management Team to identify areas of challenge and develop appropriate strategic responses June, September, December 2023, and March 2024.		This is scheduled periodically
Embed knowledge and skills gained from Senior Leadership and Management Development		This will be particularly targeted to supporting Transformation projects.

Programmes (MBA / MSc) December 2023.		
Reconfigure Leadership and Management development in the organisation to align with Transformation Programme principles December 2023.		Leadership & Management cohort established at Level 5, currently procuring level 7 through Northwest Employers, utilising the apprenticeship Levy to fund the qualification
Monitor the embedding of knowledge and skills gained through previously delivered in-house modular Leadership and Management development activity. Ongoing and report in December 2023.		Evaluation and reviews have taken place and this will inform the content and delivery of future programmes


Ref	Objective
CXDU 02	Implement the Apprenticeship Policy to support the establishment of apprenticeships across the Council, and optimise return on the Apprenticeship Levy.

Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
Establish 20 new apprentice placements within Council services, utilising existing vacancies, compliant with the requirements of apprenticeship legislation March 2024.		There is currently no specific resource in position to help to achieve this target. Rectification is planned by resource being placed in the Organisational Development Service, however a model of funding needs to be secured first to enable this. This is currently being examined within the Transformation Programme. A prospective Apprenticeship Officer Job Evaluation has taken place to establish a job grade. There are currently 4 'new hire' apprentices within the Council due to 2 having secured permanent positions.
Establish 20 new existing employee apprenticeships to enable up-skilling in a range of business areas, compliant with the requirements of apprenticeship legislation March 2024.		6 conversions this quarter, taking total up to 10 in this current financial year.

Ref	Objective
CXDU 03	Optimise the use of the Agency Worker contract across Council services, to secure ongoing reductions in the incidence and cost of agency usage, and to ensure that correct and appropriate resourcing solutions are being deployed across Council services.

Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
Review and consider most appropriate resourcing mix in collaboration with service management in areas of highest agency usage (Transformation Programme) December 2023.		Currently a key strand of Transformation Programme and dedicated resource created in HR Operations. Refer to Emerging Issues above for more information.

Ref	Objective
CXDU 04	Work with high demand service areas to develop and implement effective recruitment programmes, optimising labour market engagement to attract high quality candidates.





Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
Identify service areas with highest consistent recruitment demand, turnover, and low attraction rates. Develop tailored solutions. (Transformation Programme) December 2023.		Now a key strand of Transformation Programme. Detailed and specific campaigns running to meet requirements. Refer to Key Developments and Emerging Issues above for more information









Ref	Objective
CXDU 05	Develop and implement an organisation wide change programme – The Future Work Programme - to evaluate and introduce revised working practices following to meet the requirements of the changing labour market and employee expectation in the post-pandemic environment (to include use of accommodation, HR policy and practice, wellbeing support, application of technology)

Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
Use findings of Corporate Accommodation Review (2023) to determine available workspace capacity and develop optimum balance of 'staff to space'. December 2023.		Corporate Accommodation Review is not yet complete, so December 2023 milestone has passed. It is anticipated that further progress will be made by financial year end – further report to be made in Q4.
Develop contractual model to meet business requirements of 'staff to space' balance. March 2024		This is contingent on milestone immediately above.

Key Performance Indicators







Ref	Description	Actual 2022/23	Target 2023/24	Q3 Position	Current Progress	Direction of Travel	Supporting Commentary
CXDU LI 01	Average FTE days lost to sickness	12.98 (Days)	9.5 (Days)	8.47 (Days)			Improvement from outturn at Q3 of 2022/23 (8.65 days). Refer to narrative in key developments above around the implementation of HR Business Partnering to increase value in this topic area.
CXDU LI 02	Percentage of Employees without sickness	66.45	70.00	8.47 (Days)			Higher than same period as last year and better than outturn for whole of 22/23. Also, refer to comments against LI 01 above.
CXDU LI 03	Total Full Time Equivalent Staffing Establishment (Indicator for information only)	3,204	For information Only	81.54%	For information Only	For information Only	Reported for information purposes only.
CXDU LI 04	Total Staff (head count) (Indicator for information only)	4,127					

Ref	Description	Actual 2022/23	Target 2023/24	Q3 Position	Current Progress	Direction of Travel	Supporting Commentary
CXDU LI 05	Total Agency Worker Usage (number of placements – year to date)	766	650	528			<p>Improvement from Q3 2022/23 however outturn continues to be driven by high usage in Childrens and Adults services, resulting from labour market conditions.</p> <p>Usage across all areas, although reduced in comparison to last years is still high – refer to emerging issues above for more information. <i>(Please note, data includes 27 'off-contract-placements)</i></p>
CXDU LI 06	Total Agency Worker Cost (cumulative gross cost – year to date)	£8.34m	£5.0m	£10.5m			<p>See commentary in LI 05 immediately above and emerging issues.</p> <p>Target will inevitably be missed. <i>(Please note, the 22/23 actual has been updated to include 'off-contract' spend and has therefore increased from £8.5m previously reported)</i></p>





Ref	Description	Actual 2022/23	Target 2023/24	Q3 Position	Current Progress	Direction of Travel	Supporting Commentary
CXDU L109	The percentage of top 5% of earners that are:	61.45%	55%	62.6%			Fluctuation in (a), (b) and (c), due to turnover.
	a) Women						
	b) From BME communities	2.7%	2.0%	2.78%			It should be noted that recruitment in to the top 5% of earners is not generally a high volume, and as such scope for significant change over time is low.
c) With a disability	0%	8.0%	0.00%				
CXDU LI 10	No of staff declaring that they meet the definition of disability within the Equality Act 2010 as a % of the total workforce.	1.25%	10.00%	1.86%			Fluctuation in (a), (b) and (c), due to turnover. It should be noted that recruitment in to the top 5% of earners is not generally a high volume, and as such scope for significant change over time is low.
CXDU LI 11	Minority Ethnic community staff as % of total workforce.	0.99%	1.00%	1.5%			Demonstrates improvements and data is higher than whole of 2022/23, however fluctuation exists due to turnover and outturn tends to remain around target level.
CXDU LI 12	Average time to recruit (Applicant Tracking System reported figure)	19 Days	12.2 Days	15.4 Days			Outturn demonstrates the number of days taken from vacancy closing date to completion of recruitment. Improvement in this outturn is reflective

Key Objectives / milestones




Ref	Objective
ICT 01	Constantly evaluate and improve the usability, resilience, control and flexibility of the Council's Client interaction, Data Communications and Management, Hardware and Software provision.

Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
Continued Enhancement and delivery of the E5, M365, Azure platforms to enhance and deliver new technologies into the authority - March 2024.		Significant progress continues to be made in the delivery stages of Office 365 and Azure Cloud services. Many user data sets have been migrated and will continue through Q2/3 when it is envisaged will be completed.
Delivery of the Front Door transformation programme delivering changes in process, customer contact and customer journey - March 2024.		As defined within the body of text, the project is now underway with considerable efforts being made to define and design both procedural and technical definitions and designs
The continued development of the Records Management Unit enhancing all opportunities and creating a central fulfilment centre within - March 2024.		Ongoing development has included enhancing support for Information Management and prevention of data loss, which includes enhancements that have been implemented in respect of hybrid mail.
Development of Interactive Services, through integration with the Contact Centre and One Stop Shop's - March 2024.		An evolving programme of work moving now at pace - development of the project documentation and objective set is now underway and will be reported against as the department evolves and changes with the delivery of the objectives in line with the transformation objectives for the department
Management and development of commercial ICT opportunity within desktop, hosting and DR provision - March 2024.		The continued development and delivery of the Finance solution into partners within the city region continues with additional services and deliveries continually sought
Continued compliance with Central Government and NCSC Security guidelines and compliance requirements – March 2024.		Actively monitored by DLUHC/NCSC and external audit – progress has been good through Q1, on target.



Ref	Objective
ICT 02	The implementation of a range of new corporate wide facilities including Web services, records & document management, business process workflow, corporate desktop portal, Information governance and Security Compliance process.





Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
Delivery, deployment and Management of the E5, M365, Azure managed cloud platforms, enhancing user experience. - March 2024.		Ongoing preparatory work in the form of workshops with support staff provided by contracted support organisation. Most initial configuration of the Councils Microsoft Azure Tenant has been completed, currently working on the development of the end user experience, which is expected to be completed by the end of Q2. As within the body of text
Continued development and internal, commercial use of the Print Unit, Records management Unit - March 2024.		Ongoing development has included enhancing support for Information Management and prevention of data loss, which includes enhancements that have been implemented in respect of hybrid mail. The transfer of land search functions now complete and transfer of post, income and budget in process and delivery through the RMU is now underway.
Continued development of Contact Centre and One Stop Shop Services/Facilities/Integration with Authority wide process - March 2024. development and internal, commercial use of the Print Unit, Records management Unit - March 2024.		With the advent of the Front door/Customer Journey transformation programme, the department will evolve at pace and begin to report against developments over the coming months as the objectives are set.
The development of improved information governance and Security compliance in line with government guidelines - March 2024.		This has been built into the configuration of the Councils Microsoft Tenancy and will continue to be enhanced and reported via the SIRO reports to Management Team. These changes will continue to evolve as the deployment of the new transformed ICT platform matures. This is part of a gradual change programme supported by the Councils ICT Security Programme to minimise disruption to users, while enhancing capabilities and improving the Councils security and compliance position.







Ref	Objective
ICT 03	The implementation of a range of new corporate wide facilities including cloud and web service solutions, records & document management enhancement, business process development, customer service provision.

Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
The delivery of the Front Door transformation programmes across Admin and Support Services - March 2023.		The disaggregation of the Administrative Support Division is now underway as part of the transformation programme greater detail within the body of this report.
The delivery of new and enhanced IT Security Management and Compliance systems/facilities across the authority's user base - March 2024.		Most preparatory work has been completed. The onboarding of a Security Operations Centre will be the priority for Q2 and Q3
The delivery of new and enhanced technology provision across the authority's user base - March 2024.		Users have already been migrated for their email and calendar facilities. These will now be further enhanced to ensure improved data loss prevention and security of the council's information assets with the recently introduced MFA and background security measures.

Key Performance Indicators

Ref	Description	Actual 2022/23	Target 2023/24	Q3 Position	Current Progress	Direction of Travel	Supporting Commentary
ICT LI 01	Average availability of the Council's M365 Systems (%).	N/A	99.9%	100%			This new KPI relates to the new M365 platform that remains currently under development – The department has moved into the test phase of the development with over 150 users across all departments testing and evaluating the build and the software deployment and device deployment technologies – to date this has been highly successful with very positive feedback.


Ref	Description	Actual 2022/23	Target 2023/24	Q3 Position	Current Progress	Direction of Travel	Supporting Commentary
ICT LI 02	Security Incidents across quarter	N/A	10	8			In line with the delivery of the new M365 platform this statistic will be monitored by new systems currently under development – Again to evolve with the programme of work. Limited issues experienced and within the monthly target.
ICT LI 03	Service Desk Call Resolution	86.56%	90%	90%			<p>The Service Desk continues to be challenging with a reduced staffing due to both the posts being vacant – the Job adverts have been posted internally before the Christmas Break and will be posted externally early new year – currently the department within this area holds a number of vacancies – this is due to increase with imminent retirements as well – all posts will be advertised externally when possible.</p> <p>The levels of calls experienced at the moment are high with the changes to the ageing platforms and the move to Teams and M365 – as an unexpected number of users are struggling to get to grips with the changes – subsequently needing high levels of support for minor user issues.</p>

Ref	Description	Actual 2022/23	Target 2023/24	Q3 Position	Current Progress	Direction of Travel	Supporting Commentary
ICT LI 04	Average working days from delivery to completion of a new Laptop.	1 (Days)	1 (Days)	2 (Hours)			Again, a new KPI that will evolve with the considerable programme of work underway. With the advent of the new Dell Laptop contract completed mid-June, the device test for M365 role out plan has started with a 2-hour training session for all new users in place. This will evolve and the training will ramp up once the department can recruit and train further resources currently the team only has 2 people to carry this out – again these people are needed for day-to-day tasks limiting the training sessions.
ICT LI 05	Number of resolved customer contacts – Contact Centre	27500	27000	28960			The level of calls into the contact centre are at an expected level with seasonal changes to call patterns with Adult Social Care and Waste Management being the main focus – Q4 will show considerable changes again as the weather has been a considerable factor over the last few weeks.
ICT LI	Number of resolved contacts – One Stop Shop's	15500	15500	13090			The level of foot fall into the Shops continues to rise, with seasonal and service dependant changes are considered with Social Care and Homelessness accounting for a high level of the contacts over this winter period



Legal & Democracy

Key Objectives / milestones



Ref	Objective
LD 01	To ensure that decision makers are supported through the provision of timely and accurate advice and information and are kept informed of changing legislation and responsibilities.









Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
Review constitution - May 2023.		The revised Constitution was approved at Annual Council

Ref	Objective
LD 02	To provide efficient and effective Democratic Support Services that provides Elected Members, as key decision makers, with the necessary information, support and training opportunities to fulfil their individual potential and management and governance role effectively.

Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
To ensure that all members have been given the opportunity of a having a MAP meeting where desired.		All Members have been offered a MAP meeting.
To induct all new members by October 2023.		The new Members have been inducted.

Key Performance Indicators



Ref	Description	Actual 2022/23	Target 2023/24	Q3 Position	Current Progress	Direction of Travel	Supporting Commentary
LD LI 01	No. Of Members with Personal Development Plans (54 Total).	54	54	54			All Members have been offered a MAP. Take up is a matter of personal choice.

Ref	Description	Actual 2022/23	Target 2023/24	Q3 Position	Current Progress	Direction of Travel	Supporting Commentary
LD LI 02	Percentage of Members attending at least one organised Training Event.	52 98%	54 100%	34 61%			Reasonable progress has been made, but as always attendance is a matter of personal choice for Members.
LD LI 03	Average Time taken to issue prosecutions from receipt of full instructions (working days).	10 (Days)	10 (Days)	10 (Days)			The target has been met.
LD LI 04	Average time taken to file application for Care proceedings at Court from receipt of all written evidence from client department (working days).	3 (Days)	3 (Days)	3 (Days)			The target has been met.
LD LI 05	% of Executive Board minutes published within 5 working days after the meeting.	100%	100%	100%			The target has been met.


Community & Environment

Key Objectives / milestones












CE 05	To routinely use customer feedback to drive forward service improvement in the Registration Service
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Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
<p>Ensure our services are available to those who wish to or who need to use them by providing accessible information in a range of ways (e.g. written information, online services).</p>		<p>Registration Service information is provided in written format e.g. leaflets and price lists. We also provide information via our own websites:</p> <p>www.halton.gov.uk/registration and www.weddingsinhalton.co.uk</p> <p>In accordance with General Register Office (GRO) protocols, we provide the latest statutory Registration information and guidance, via web links: www.gov.uk</p> <p>In addition, to assist those with physical and sensory access needs; and to help plan and prepare for their visit to the Register Office, we also provide a web link to:</p> <p>https://www.accessable.co.uk/halton-borough-council/access-guides/halton-register-office</p>
<p>Seek the views of the local community and make adjustments to our service delivery when appropriate, based on customer feedback, to improve the service going forward. Where feedback cannot be acted upon, an explanation will be given.</p>		<p>As part of our annual reporting to GRO, we have a Customer Engagement Strategy (2022/20233).</p> <p>In addition, we have a published set of Service Standards at:</p> <p>www.halton.gov.uk/registration and www.weddingsinhalton.co.uk</p>

Ref	Objective
CE 06	Develop a Stadium Business Plan and Marketing Strategy to make the Stadium more commercially viable.

Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
Business Plan & Marketing Strategy		<p>The Environment Services Division was able to deliver all works within the Council's agreed specification for green space management.</p>

Key Performance Indicators





Ref	Description	Actual 2022/23	Target 2023/24	Q3 Position	Current Progress	Direction of Travel	Supporting Commentary
CE LI 10	Registration Service - Births - 98% registered within 42 days	100%	100%	100%			Highlighted Performance: 97.30% Deaths Registered within 2 working days. 94.79% Customers seen early or on time within 10 minutes of the appointment time. Figures in line with expectations
CE LI 11	Registration Service - Deaths with MCCDs (no coronial involvement) - 90% registered within 5 days	87%*	100%	100%			Figures in line with expectations
CE LI 12	% Take up of free school meals to those who are eligible - Primary Schools.		75%	72.02%			Figures are now based on revised October Census day figures.
CE LI 13	% Take up of free school meals to those who are eligible - Secondary Schools.		60%	64.27%			Figures are now based on revised October Census day figures.
CE LI 14	Take up of school lunches (%) – primary schools.		60%	56.8%			Figures are now based on revised October Census day figures.
CE LI 15	Take up of school lunches (%) – secondary schools.		50%	61.58%			This figure will be revised after October Census to get a more accurate number of pupils on roll




Ref	Description	Actual 2022/23	Target 2023/24	Q3 Position	Current Progress	Direction of Travel	Supporting Commentary
CE LI 16	Room Occupancy – Meetings (Box Level)	12.34%	40%	29.75%			New KPI for monitoring occupancy rates.
CE LI 17	Room Occupancy – Conferences (Bridge & Karalius)	50.19%	60%	43.46%			New KPI for monitoring occupancy rates.

Property Services


Key Objectives / milestones

Ref	Objective
EEP 07	Corporate Resources: To provide an effective corporate property service



Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
Ensure the leisure centre is on track on 31st March 2024 both in terms of time and cost by project managing it throughout the year.		The work is currently on programme and on budget, the contractual completion date being 5 th February 2025.
Ensure the contractor commences on site with the major upgrade works at both St Patrick's and St Luke's by 1st Sept 2023.		Works have been delayed due to the Decarbonisation works bid to the PSDS, it is hoped to commence works on site in Spring 2024
Ensure all the projects are progressed in line with the school maintenance programme and are delivered by 31st March 2024.		The majority of the works have now been completed, all remaining projects will be complete by 31 st March 2024
Ensure all the projects are progressed in line with the corporate maintenance programme and are delivered by 31st March 2024.		A significant number of the projects are now completed, others are still to be completed. The budget will be fully spent at year end.

Submit a decarbonisation funding bid in conjunction with the Combined Authority by October 2023 and be successful in having the funding approved by 31 st March 2024.		It was decided not to submit bids in conjunction with the Combined Authority, two separate HBC bids have been submitted however. We should be notified if these have been successful or not by the end of January 2024
Ensure there is a wide and varied mix of commodities and services on offer in the Market and ensure occupancy levels are maintained or increased by 31st March 2024 .		There are a wide and varied mix of commodities and services on offer at the Market, Occupancy rates have dropped slightly however since last year. The reason for this is challenges posed by both the cost of living issues due to inflation, and the car parking charges associated with the nearby car park.
Ensure all necessary servicing, and repairs and maintenance is carried out within our properties by 31st March 2024 and ensure building managers are satisfied with the service provided.		Servicing of plant and equipment is continuing to be carried out at all premises in line with legislative requirements.




Ref	Objective
EEP 08	Corporate Priority: To design, manage and improve processes to generate increasing value for customers and other stakeholders. To undertake Employee Reviews for all staff

Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
All EDRs to be completed by September 23		All EDRs reported as completed by relevant managers

Ref	Objective
EEP 09	Corporate Priority: To design, manage and deliver a place-based business support programme for Halton Commission support sessions to provide advice and guidance based on initial diagnostic.

Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
Scheme in Place September 2023		Delay in procurement but will be mitigated with delivery over the remainder of the programme.
Scheme finalised March 2025		On-line to be delivered by March 2025

Ref	Objective
EEP 10	Corporate Priority: Secure funding, support procurement and ground-breaking to take place for Ultraviolet at Sci Tech Daresbury Commissioning of Ultraviolet

Milestone	Progress Q3	Supporting Commentary
Funding Secured Q3 2023 / 2024		Work is currently ongoing to finalise the Full Business Case for IZ funding to support Project Violet Phase 2. The Joint Venture have commenced tendering and a start on site is anticipated in Q1 2024.
Procurement Q4 2023 / 2024		The Joint Venture have commenced tendering.
Groundbreaking Q1 2024 2025		Start on site is anticipated in Q1 2024.

Key Performance Indicators

OPERATIONAL ISSUES	BASELINE POSITION	OUTCOMES AT END OF YEAR 1	OUTCOMES AT END OF YEAR 3	INTERVENTIONS	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
Climate change agenda and carbon emissions	CO2 emissions for 2021/22 amount to 9327 tonnes	Reduce emissions by 1%	Reduce emissions by 5%		<p>Submit a funding bid and obtain funding to carry out decarbonisation works to various buildings.</p> <p>Continue to deliver the LED lighting replacement programme.</p> <p>Carry out further rationalisation of our property portfolio to reduce emissions.</p> <p>Help carry out education programme for officers and Members alike</p>
Level of satisfaction with repair & maintenance service delivered via the FM team	75% of surveys returned were rated as either good or excellent	80% Of surveys returned rated as either good or excellent	85% Of surveys returned rated as either good or excellent		<p>Issue questionnaires to building managers in order to rate the level of service provided.</p> <p>Continue to deliver a repairs and maintenance service in a timely manner, with quality contractors.</p> <p>Continue with the procurement of contractors, when necessary, based on best value principles.</p>

7.0 Financial Statements

Finance Department

Revenue Budget as at 31 December 2023

	Annual Budget	Budget to Date	Actual Spend	Variance (Overspend)	Forecast Outturn
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Expenditure					
Employees	6,500	4,868	4,765	103	134
Insurances	1,044	980	977	3	10
Supplies & Services	359	290	309	(19)	(28)
Rent Allowances	35,500	22,167	22,167	0	0
Concessionary Travel	1,748	1,050	982	68	76
Non HRA Rent Rebates	70	36	36	0	0
Discretionary Social Fund	106	30	6	24	33
Discretionary Housing Payments	300	169	169	0	0
Household Support Fund Expenditure	1,487	1,487	1,487	0	0
Energy Bills Support	41	41	41	0	0
LCR Levy	2,241	1,681	1,681	0	0
Transfer to Reserves	17	0	0	0	17
Bad Debt Provision	77	0	0	0	0
Total Expenditure	49,490	32,799	32,620	179	242
Income					
Other Fees & Charges	-344	-256	-236	(20)	(36)
Burdens Grant	-60	-60	-94	34	34
Dedicated schools Grant	-123	0	0	0	0
Council Tax Liability Order	-541	-500	-535	35	44
Business Rates Admin Grant	-157	0	0	0	0
Schools SLAs	-295	-295	-311	16	6
LCR Reimbursement	-2,241	-1,681	-1,681	0	0
HB Overpayment Debt Recovery	-400	-119	-119	0	0
Rent Allowances	-34,800	-21,500	-21,136	(364)	(478)
Non HRA Rent Rebate	-70	-40	-51	11	27
Discretionary Housing Payment Grant	-300	-279	-279	0	0
Housing Benefits Admin Grant	-515	-386	-393	7	5
Universal Credits	-5	0	0	0	0
Council Tax Admin Grant	-204	0	0	0	0
Household Support Fund Grant	-1,487	-892	-892	0	0
Energy Bills Support	-41	-36	-36	0	0
Alternative Fuel	-57	-20	-20	0	0
Transfer from Reserves	-134	0	0	0	0
Reimbursements & Other Grants	-153	-140	-140	0	0
CCG McMillan Reimbursement	-82	0	0	0	0
Total Income	-42,009	-26,204	-25,923	(281)	(398)
Net Operational Expenditure	7,481	6,595	6,697	(102)	(156)
Recharges					
Premises Support	268	193	193	0	0
Transport	0	0	0	0	0
Central Support	2,069	1,508	1,508	0	0
Asset Rental Support	0	0	0	0	0
HBC Support Costs Income	-5,330	-3,778	-3,778	0	0
Net Total Recharges	-2,993	-2,077	-2,077	0	0
Net Departmental Expenditure	4,488	4,518	4,620	(102)	(156)

Comments on the above figures

As at the end of December 2023 the department is reporting an overspend of £0.099m, it is expected net spend for the year will be over the approved budget by £0.156m

Staffing forecasts for the year now include the actual 2023/24 pay award. Due to a number of vacancies and where possible, recharging staff time to grants, staffing costs are forecasted to be under budget by £0.134m. This has the impact of reducing the forecasted overspend of £0.248m reported at the end of quarter 2.

Rent allowances continue to be an area of concern. Increased demand for supported accommodation results in increased costs for the Council over and above the housing benefit grant received. This should ideally net to zero, however Government will only support up to a nominal figure after which, 60% will come from housing benefits and the remaining 40% is up to the Council to support. The impact of this can be seen from the £0.478m forecasted overspend by the end of the 2023/24 financial year.

The insurance budget is also under significant pressure, new contracts are out for tender and there has been an increase in costs across all policy premiums, resulting in an estimated overspend of £0.134m which has been funded from the insurance reserve.

The most notable area of underspend against budget continues to be concessionary travel, where net spend will be approximately £0.076m lower than budget at financial year-end, a slight increase from the forecast in quarter 2. Concessionary travel has been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 Pandemic as overall usage levels are still lower than pre covid levels. Bus operators indicate that current levels have become the new standard, and it is unlikely we will see passenger numbers grow much further. Reimbursement levels will need to be renegotiated and updated to reflect the new standards of operation, following the update, it is likely that the full budget profile will be utilised for Concessionary Travel again in the 2024/25 financial year.

Approved 2023/24 Savings






Please see Appendix A for details of progress towards achieving budget efficiency savings agreed by Council in February 2023.




FINANCE DEPARTMENT

APPENDIX A

Progress Against Agreed Savings

Ref.	Service Area	Net Budget £'000	Description of Saving Proposal	Savings Value			Current Progress	Comments
				23/24 £'000	24/25 £'000	25/26 £'000		
F1	Client Finance	109	Increase by £3 per week the charge to clients for the Appointeeship's Service to ensure full cost recovery.	45	0	0	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Implemented in April 2023 and income budget increased accordingly
F6	Income Control	118	Removal of payment kiosks which are now significantly under-utilised and in need of replacement. The ceasing of annual rental and licence costs will provide a saving. Residents can instead make payments for council tax etc. via the numerous Paypoint outlets across the Borough.	20	0	0	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Implemented April 2023 and expenditure budgets reduced accordingly
F8	Insurance	1,043	Reduction in the insurance budgets, following a review of claims history over recent years with advice from the Council's insurance broker. The majority of claims are provided for	135	0	0	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Implemented April 2023 and expenditure budgets reduced accordingly

			via self-insurance, with external policies providing cover for exceptional or potentially high cost claims.					
F9	Internal Audit	300	Restructure in light of potential retirements over the next two years within the Internal Audit Team.	0	0	50		Planned restructure to take place during 2024/25 and to be implemented 1 April 2025
F11	Purchase to Pay	27	Increase in the target income budgets for the Early Payment Scheme (£15k) and the Corporate Card Programme rebate (£15k)	30	0	0		Implemented 2023/24 income budgets increased accordingly
F12	Benefits Processing & Administration	216	Deletion of a 1.0fte vacant Housing Benefit Officer Post and a 0.5fte vacant Visiting Officer Post.	55	0	0		These two vacant posts accepted for a saving in 2023/24 and can be deleted from the structure.
F13	Discretionary Support Scheme	221	Review the roles, procedures and structure of the team.	0	25	0		A review of the DSS structure will be undertaken in 2024/25.
F15	Business Rates	-26	Increase the charge to Halton Chamber of Commerce for providing billing and collection of Business Improvement	2	0	0		2023/24 operating agreement between the Council and Halton Chamber of Commerce still to be agreed.

			District (BID) income.					
F16	Concessionary Travel	1,892	Due to a decrease in passenger numbers following Covid, it is considered that the budget for concessionary travel costs can be reduced. The budget was underspent by £421k (20%) in 2021/22. A reduction in this budget will not prevent any eligible concessionary passenger from still being able to travel.	150	0	0		On Target
F17	Council Tax	84	Increase the charges applied when a court summons is issued by 30% (£23), to achieve full cost recovery over the three year period.	40	40	40		On target, summons cost increased for 2023/24
F17 Cont	Council Tax	N/A	Establish a new post dedicated to reviewing council tax exemptions. It is considered at least a 3% reduction in Single Person Discount awards could be achieved, generating	116	0	0		Post appointed to and review of exemptions to commence over the next quarter.

			approximately £150k of additional council tax income, less the cost of the new post.					
F18	Financial Management - Treasury Management	1,152	Closer management of medium- to long-term cash balances will give greater opportunity to invest in higher interest bearing accounts due to increasing interest rates.	300	0	0	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Interest payable on target to achieve increased target.
Total Finance Department				893	65	90		

CHIEF EXECUTIVES DELIVERY UNIT

Revenue Budget as at 31 December 2023

	Annual Budget £'000	Budget to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure					
Employees	2,795	2,045	2,042	3	4
Employees Training	117	62	59	3	5
Apprenticeship Levy	300	125	139	(14)	(19)
Supplies & Services	303	290	263	27	68
Total Expenditure	3,515	2,522	2,503	19	58
Income					
Fees & Charges	-211	-135	-124	(11)	(15)
Schools SLA	-533	-533	-532	(1)	(1)
Total Income	-744	-668	-656	(12)	(16)
Net Operational Expenditure	2,771	1,854	1,847	7	42
Recharges					
Premises Support	117	88	88	0	0
Transport	0	0	0	0	0
Central Support	1,023	768	768	0	0
Asset Rental Support	53	0	0	0	0
HBC Support Costs Income	-5,491	-4,119	-4,119	0	0
Net Total Recharges	-4,298	-3,263	-3,263	0	0
Net Departmental Expenditure	-1,527	-1,409	-1,416	7	42

Comments on the above figures

With the formal introduction of the Transformation Programme, the Chief Executive's Delivery Unit (previously Policy, People, Performance & Efficiency) is undergoing a period of change within the current financial year. In quarter 3 the net spend outturn performance is forecast at £0.042m under budget, which is a marginal decrease from the £0.057m forecasted at the end of quarter 2.

The most notable impact within the last quarter, is the restructure taking place in recruitment and resourcing, this has resulted in an updated employee spend forecast of £0.004m under budget, down from £0.053m last quarter. The increased costs will be built into the budget for 2024/25 but the current year variance has been funded through the existing underspend generated from secondments to the Transformation Programme.

Approved 2023/24 Savings

Please see Appendix A for details of progress towards achieving budget efficiency savings agreed by Council in February 2023.

Capital Project as at 31st December 2023

	Annual Capital Allocation £'000	Allocation to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Total Allocation Remaining £'000
Expenditure				
Transformation Programme	5,000	3,750	1,967	3,033
Total Capital	5,000	3,750	1,967	3,033



Comments on the above figures

The Transformation Programme has begun within the Council, a number of staff are now in post and consultancy work has begun in the following areas which should positively impact the Council in both financial and non-financial objectives:

- Employer of choice (Workforce)
- Adults Social Care
- Childrens Social Care
- Customer Journey (Front door)

POLICY, PEOPLE, PERFORMANCE AND EFFICIENCY DEPARTMENT

APPENDIX A

Ref.	Service Area	Net Budget £'000	Description of Saving Proposal	Savings Value			Current Progress	Comments
				23/24 £'000	24/25 £'000	25/26 £'000		
PPPE1	Apprenticeships	198	Reduce the budget which provides for apprenticeship salaries by 50%. More apprenticeships will therefore be attached to vacant posts which are already budgeted for. This may particularly help to fill vacancies in areas where recruitment is difficult.	99	0	0		Reflected within the 2022/23 budget.
PPPE4	Organisational Development & Performance	383	Explore whether Organisational Development / Learning and Development activities could be rationalised and restructured to reduce cost, given there is currently a vacant post within the team.	65	0	0		Restructures to the team are currently being considered to help develop and change the way Organisational Development/Learning is carried out.
Total PPPE Department				164	0	0		

ICT & ADMINISTRATION

Revenue Budget as at 31 December 2023

	Annual Budget	Budget to Date	Actual Spend	Variance (Overspend)	Forecast Outturn
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Expenditure					
Employee Expenditure	8,126	6,094	6,382	(288)	(372)
Supplies & Services Expenditure	950	909	916	(7)	(28)
Capital Finance	78	58	36	22	28
Computer Repairs & Software	1,333	1,020	1,131	(111)	(82)
Communication Costs	13	10	84	(74)	(81)
Premises Expenditure	175	142	111	31	39
Transport Expenditure	3	2	1	1	1
Total Expenditure	10,678	8,235	8,661	(426)	(495)
Income					
Fees & Charges	-996	-50	-107	57	209
Schools SLA Income	-610	-610	-606	(4)	(4)
Total Income	-1,606	-660	-713	53	205
Net Operational Expenditure	9,072	7,575	7,948	(373)	(290)
Recharges					
Premises Support	557	418	418	0	0
Transport	16	12	12	0	0
Central Support	1,797	1,348	1,348	0	0
Asset Rental Support	1,494	0	0	0	0
HBC Support Costs Income	-10,951	-8,215	-8,215	0	0
Net Total Recharges	-7,087	-6,437	-6,437	0	0
Net Departmental Expenditure	1,985	1,138	1,511	(373)	(290)

Comments on the above figures

At the end of December 2023 the department is expected to exceed the annual approved budget by £0.290m. Marginally worse original position from that reported in Q2 (£0.260m).

Employee costs for the year are expected to exceed the budget position by approximately £0.372m. This is based on staff turnover saving targets not currently being achieved. In the 2024/25 financial year the Administration Staff will be disaggregated, and their respective budgets will move to the service areas, however for the current financial year, the budgets will remain in the ICT and Administration Department for reporting purposes.

The over achievement of income against Fees and Charges relates to external client income for traded services. This is for Agresso implementation and support at partner sites. There is also marginally higher MFD usage within schools which has offset lower than budgeted SLA uptake, with the shift to academies and increased fees this is likely to continue to worsen. With a number of agency staff across the Council, the department is continuing to recharge licence costs for non HBC staff to their respective departments, this should help budget holders more readily see the impact agency staff are having on Council's finances as there is not just the direct fees to be considered, there is strain on a number of other services and existing contracts which do come at additional costs.

Supplies & Services, Computer Repairs & Software, and Communication costs are all forecasted to be over the budget profile by the end of the financial year. With the shift to Windows 11 and the

more efficient laptops, the Council will see an increase in the costs as both legacy and new systems are in operation.

The new model will cost more due to the enhanced technology and reliance on cloud software, however, the efficiency of the new system should have a significant impact on the efficiency of the Council's staff.

Approved 2023/24 Savings

Please see Appendix A for details of progress towards achieving budget efficiency savings agreed by Council in February 2023.

Capital Projects as at 31 December 2023

	Annual Capital Allocation	Allocation to Date	Actual Spend	Total Allocation Remaining
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Expenditure				
ICT Rolling Capital Project	700	525	287	413
Total Capital	700	525	287	413

Comments on the above figures

The ICT and Admin Department has a rolling budget of £0.700m for capital needs each year. The capital allocation will be reduced by £0.218m to fund a new laptop contract with Dell. The new hardware will be able to function without the use of VDI, meaning all Council staff utilising laptops should see an increase in performance allowing them to carry out their work more efficiently. In recent years there has been a shift into user-based subscription costs for Microsoft Office and other software licences, meaning that the IT department in future years will be less reliant on the capital allocation and there will be a significant strain on the revenue funds.

ICT AND SUPPORT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

APPENDIX A

Ref.	Service Area	Net Budget £'000	Description of Saving Proposal	Savings Value			Current Progress	Comments
				23/24 £'000	24/25 £'000	25/26 £'000		
ICT3	External Clients	N/A	Recharge the Youth Offending Services for the full cost of ICT services which are hosted by Halton, but have not thus far been recharged. This approach has been agreed by the Cheshire and Warrington partner councils.	232	0	0	U	Final figure still to be agreed with partner councils.
Total ICT and Admin Department				232	0	0		

LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Revenue Budget as at 31 December 2023

	Annual Budget	Budget to Date	Actual Spend	Variance (Overspend)	Forecast Outturn
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Expenditure					
Employees	1,436	1,106	1,048	58	77
Agency Costs (Locums)	0	0	577	(577)	(757)
Supplies & Services	164	128	154	(26)	(28)
Civic Catering & Functions	26	19	6	13	11
Legal Expenses	218	163	399	(236)	(271)
Transport Related Expenditure	11	8	7	1	4
Total Expenditure	1,855	1,424	2,191	(767)	(964)
Income					
School SLA's	-92	-92	-78	(14)	(14)
Licence Income	-284	-213	-205	(8)	42
Reimbursement & Other Grants	0	0	-25	25	25
Fees & Charges Income	-70	-54	-57	3	5
Transfer from Reserves	0	0	-596	596	776
Total Income	-446	-359	-961	602	834
Net Operational Expenditure	1,409	1,065	1,230	(165)	(130)
Recharges					
Premises Support	58	43	43	0	0
Transport	0	0	0	0	0
Central Support	282	212	212	0	0
Asset Rental Support	0	0	0	0	0
HBC Support Costs Income	0	0	0	0	0
Net Total Recharges	340	255	255	0	0
Net Departmental Expenditure	1,749	1,320	1,485	(165)	(130)

Comments on the above figures

As at the end of December 2023 the department is reporting a net overspend against budget. It is currently forecast that net spend for the department will be over the approved budget by approximately £0.130m at the end of the financial year.

Employee costs for the year are still expected to marginally be below the approved budget. This is a result of the number of vacancies that exist within the department but mitigated by agency costs. The main area of concern for the department is the volume of agency costs resulting from hard to fill vacant posts. It is expected these costs will be in the region of £0.757m at the end of the financial year. This figure has increased due to additional staffing resources required for Children's Care Orders and clearing a backlog of cases. Whilst it has been agreed that these costs will be funded from reserves it is important that the Council takes action to begin to reduce reliance on agency usage. Benchmarking work is currently being undertaken to review the structure and remuneration offers at other Local Authorities to identify if there is any action which can be taken to reduce the agency costs.

Within the forecast £0.271m overspend against budget of legal expenses, there is an estimated £0.353m costs relating to the contracting of barristers, most of which again, are due to the limited number of staff available to clear an increasing caseload. The impact of the transformation and recovery work in Children Services, along with increased support from the recruitment team, should help alleviate the pressure seen in this area.

Approved 2023/24 Savings

Please see Appendix A for details of progress towards achieving budget efficiency savings agreed by Council in February 2023.

LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES DEPARTMENT

APPENDIX A

Ref	Service Area	Net Budget £'000	Description of Saving Proposal	Savings Value			Current Progress	Comments
				23/24 £'000	24/25 £'000	25/26 £'000		
L4	Marketing, Design and Communications	45	Review the frequency of production of Inside Halton, as part of the wider consideration of the Council's communications strategy required for the Transformation Programme	0	15	0	U	The marketing and communications team has now moved within the Chief executives Delivery Unit so that they can review the frequency of production.
L5	Mayoral Services	102	Review the various budgets comprising the Mayoral function, with a target to achieve a 20% savings across these.	20	0	0	U	Looking at alternative ways to run the events and bring operations in line with other local authorities who have more independent/self-funded events. The savings should be on track to be met by the end of the year.
Total Legal Services Department				20	15	0		

COMMUNITY & GREENSPACE

Revenue Budget as at 31 December 2023

	Annual Budget	Budget to Date	Actual Spend	Variance (Overspend)	Forecast Outturn
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Expenditure					
Employees	17,085	12,606	11,991	615	820
Premises	3,817	2,200	2,048	152	274
Supplies & Services	1,609	1,307	1,372	(65)	(86)
Hired & Contracted Services	607	413	637	(224)	(299)
Book Fund	140	108	113	(5)	(7)
Food Provisions	371	158	268	(110)	(147)
School Meals Food	1,965	1,474	1,540	(66)	(88)
Miscellaneous Transport Costs	117	77	96	(19)	(25)
Other Agency Costs	601	490	429	61	81
Other Expenditure	0	0	9	(9)	(9)
Waste Disposal Contracts	6,885	1,146	1,077	69	91
Grants to Voluntary Organisations	67	48	16	32	43
Grant to Norton Priory	172	172	174	(2)	(1)
Capital Financing	201	180	118	62	83
Total Expenditure	33,637	20,379	19,888	491	730
Income					
Sales Income	-3,962	-3,098	-2,292	(806)	(1,075)
Fees & Charges Income	-5,752	-4,691	-5,113	422	564
Rental Income	-221	-149	-182	33	43
Government Grant Income	-827	-3,244	-3,434	190	252
Reimbursements & Other Grant Income	-676	-445	-496	51	67
SLA Income	-2,391	-2,321	-2,139	(182)	(242)
Internal Fees Income	-592	-158	-275	117	156
Capital Salaries	-173	-106	-73	(33)	(43)
Transfers From Reserves	-20	51	51	0	2
Total Income	-14,614	-14,161	-13,953	(208)	(276)
Net Operational Expenditure	19,023	6,218	5,935	283	454
Recharges					
Premises Support	1,825	1,369	1,369	0	0
Transport	2,046	1,504	1,592	(88)	(117)
Central Support	3,856	2,893	2,897	(4)	(5)
Asset Rental Support	199	0	0	0	0
HBC Support Costs Income	-540	-409	-409	0	0
Net Total Recharges	7,386	5,357	5,449	(92)	(122)
Net Departmental Expenditure	26,409	11,575	11,384	191	332

Comments on the above figures

Financial Position

The net department spend is £0.191m under budget at the end of Quarter 3 and the estimated outturn underspend against budget for 2023/24 is £0.332m.

This represents a significant improvement on the forecast outturn overspend of £0.564m estimated at the end of Qtr2. The variance between the two quarters is largely attributed to employee and premises costs over the year to date being lower than expected.

Net employee spend is estimated to be under the approved budget at the end of the financial year by £0.820m. This is due to the number of vacancies within leisure services and reduced casual usage in line with 2022/23 actual data. The costs included within the report now take account of all 2023.24 pay awards being agreed and paid to employees.

Utilities budgets for 2023/24 were inflated due to the expected rise in energy costs, however, the actual charges to date have not been as high as forecasted. There has also been a considerable saving on Crematorium gas charges as the new cremator is more efficient. Gas usage at the Stadium has been reduced due to using heat source pumps. Energy costs for the year are under review and a prudent approach has been taken in estimates.

Hired and Contracted Services has increased since Q2 due to additional costs of Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme, funding for these costs will be met by additional Government Grant recorded against income.

Food Provisions is overspent due to the continuing increase of food costs from suppliers driven by high inflation over the past year.

Due to delays in receiving waste disposal contract invoices spend for the year has been estimated based on the average costs from 2022/23. Any changes to these estimates could have a large impact on the Department's outturn position.

Sales income for the year is expected to underachieve compared to the budgeted income target. Shortfalls in income at the Stadium, school meal sales plus a reduction in room hire at Community Centres and Libraries are forecast to contribute towards lower income levels. This shortfall against the income target is mitigated by reduced employee costs and casual usage at these establishments.

Other Income categories are estimated to overachieve against budget due to additional income levels for Trade and Green Waste Collection fees plus letting fees and promotions at The Brindley.

Additional grant income has been received from Sport England under the Swimming Pool Support Fund initiative to ensure the continued provision of leisure centres in the Borough.

School Meals SLA income is forecast to underachieve over the course of the year, but this will be mitigated by reduced staffing costs.

Approved 2023/24 Savings

Please see Appendix A for details of progress towards achieving budget efficiency savings agreed by Council in February 2023.

Capital Projects as at 31 December 2023

Project Title	2023/24 Capital Allocation £'000	Allocation to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Total Allocation Remaining £'000
Stadium Minor Works	34	20	18	16
Halton Leisure Centre	15,056	12,600	12,550	2,506
Brookvale Pitch Refurbishment	28	14	13	15
Open Spaces Schemes	851	200	150	701
Children's Playground Equipment	105	20	20	85
Upton Improvements	13	0	0	13
Crow Wood Park Play Area	12	1	1	11
Landfill Tax Credit Schemes	340	0	0	340
Runcorn Town Park	284	120	117	167
Spike Island / Wigg Island	1,023	35	32	991
Pickerings Pasture Café	520	0	0	520
Litter Bins	20	0	0	20
Totals	18,286	13,010	12,901	5,385

Comments on the above figures

Brookvale Pitch Refurbishment

This project is now completed - waiting on invoice for outstanding works so project can be closed down.

Halton (Moor Lane) Leisure Centre

Construction is on track and in line with expected spend.

Open Spaces

This covers spending on a variety of externally funded projects: Birchfield Gardens refurbishment, Upton Rocks access works, The Big Halton Forest, and some small minor works contracts. Spending is behind target due to capacity issues.

Children's Playground Equipment

This is an ongoing project which includes spend on improvements within the Borough's playgrounds.

Upton Improvements

Open space improvement works undertaken.

Crow Wood Park

The main contract is now completed, outstanding balance will cover final and retention payments.

Landfill Tax Credits Schemes

Currently used to support improvements for a rolling programme of existing playgrounds/open space schemes across the Borough.

Runcorn Town Park

Project to renew park infrastructure. Project is ongoing with 2 contracts on site. Carry forward to complete work in season and for contingency payments.

Wigg/Spike Island Recovery Works





The programme was slightly behind due to staff capacity issues. However, a consultancy is in place and have begun site investigation works ahead of finalising designs/contract documentation for tender.

Pickerings Pasture Café

Site surveys are on-going, planning application and tender documentation currently being prepared; the anticipated start on site is Spring 2024 with a completion Autumn 2024.

COMMUNITY & GREENSPACE DEPARTMENT

APPENDIX A

Ref.	Service Area	Net Budget £'000	Description of Saving Proposal	Savings Value			Current Progress	Comments
				23/24 £'000	24/25 £'000	25/26 £'000		
COMM1	The Brindley Theatre	64	Reduce Box Office opening hours from 10am-5pm Monday-Friday to 10am-2pm. Currently 80% of tickets are purchased online or by telephone and this is increasing each year. Replace all non-LED lighting in the building. This is estimated to reduce on-stage energy costs by 75%.	10 10	0 0	0 0		Box Office core opening hours were reduced to 5 hours (Mon – Fri) 10am – 3pm. They will be realigned to 4 hours daily 11am – 3.00pm (Mon – Fri) from 1 September onwards. No LED lighting has yet been installed but is planned for later in the financial year.
COMM3	Sport & Recreation	471	Restructuring the roles and responsibilities of the Sports Development Team	0	36	0		On track to meet savings identified for 2024/25.
COMM4	Stadium & Catering Services	751	Franchise the concourse only catering services to an external operator. An organisational restructure is currently being implemented for Stadium & Catering Services to reflect recent service changes.	50 40	0 0	0 0		
COMM6	Area Forums	170	Reduce the base budget provision to £50k temporarily for one year, with all unspent monies in 2022/23 (currently £120k) being carried forward to be spent by the relevant Area Forums in 2023/24. The base budget position will then be reviewed for 2024/25.	120	-120	0		Implemented in 2023/24 budget setting.
COMM5	Stadium & Catering Services – School Meals	12	Cease to deliver the school meals service, which has made significant losses of over £200,000 for a number of years and is forecast to make a similar loss by year-end. Work would be undertaken with schools over the next two years to support	0	0	12		Work underway in school meals being delivered through alternative means

Ref.	Service Area	Net Budget £'000	Description of Saving Proposal	Savings Value			Current Progress	Comments
				23/24 £'000	24/25 £'000	25/26 £'000		
			them to secure an alternative means of delivery, whether in-house or via an external provider.					
Total Community & Environment Department				230	-84	12		

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ECONOMY ENTERPRISE & PROPERTY DEPARTMENT

Revenue Operational Budget at 31 December 2023

	Annual Budget	Budget to Date	Actual Spend	Variance (Overspend)	Forecast Outturn
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Expenditure					
Employees	5,491	4,195	4,118	77	103
Repairs & Maintenance	1,980	1,453	1,464	(11)	(14)
Premises	123	110	116	(6)	(6)
Energy & Water Costs	1,782	1,057	860	197	262
NNDR	763	702	639	63	84
Rents	175	167	165	2	2
Economic Regeneration Activities	27	3	3	0	0
Security	501	331	372	(41)	(55)
Supplies & Services	430	300	267	33	44
Supplies & Services - Grant	772	356	356	0	0
Grants to Voluntary Organisations	264	120	120	0	0
Capital Finance	44	44	44	0	0
Transfer to Reserves	40	40	40	0	0
Total Expenditure	12,392	8,878	8,564	314	420
Income					
Fees & Charges Income	-860	-488	-562	74	98
Rent - Commercial Properties	-908	-566	-528	(38)	(50)
Rent - Investment Properties	-44	-34	-30	(4)	(5)
Rent - Markets	-852	-644	-609	(35)	(47)
Government Grant	-1,387	-614	-614	0	0
Reimbursements & Other Grant Income	-585	-633	-643	10	13
Schools SLA Income	-299	-294	-258	(36)	(36)
Recharges to Capital	-282	-114	-119	5	7
Transfer from Reserves	-1,270	-1,229	-1,229	0	0
Total Income	-6,487	-4,616	-4,592	-24	-20
Net Operational Expenditure	5,905	4,262	3,972	290	400
Recharges					
Premises Support	2,006	1,505	1,505	0	0
Transport Support	23	16	19	(3)	(3)
Central Support	1,710	1,283	1,283	0	0
Asset Rental Support	4	0	0	0	0
Recharge Income	-7,728	-5,796	-5,796	0	0
Net Total Recharges	-3,985	-2,992	-2,989	-3	-3
Net Departmental Expenditure	1,920	1,270	983	287	397

Comments on the above figures

Budget monitoring is undertaken on a monthly basis with budget holders to ensure that unapproved overspends are avoided, developing action plans to achieve efficiencies and address areas of budget pressure.

Finance works closely with the department to manage and analyse underspending to identify potential savings that could help meet current and future years' priorities.

Comparison to Previous Quarter

Economy, Enterprise & Property outturn has improved from a forecasted net spend outturn of £0.204m over budget to £0.397m under budget at the end of the financial year.

Supporting Information

The Department consists of 154fte of which 66fte are core funded, with a staff turnover savings target of £0.134m. There has continued to be delays in recruiting across the department, and so the projection is currently that employee expenditure across the department will be under budget by £0.103m at financial year-end.

By carefully monitoring the accounts, the department has used grant/external funding where possible to try and relieve the pressure on the core Council budget. This is reflected in employee expenses this quarter where various projects have been identified and staff time has been charged accordingly. This process will continue throughout the year. This Q3 report includes the 23/24 pay award. Projections for the final quarter of the year have been updated.

As inflation is running much higher than originally predicted at the time of budget setting, the department will be expected to absorb any price increases that may arise from within the budget allocations made. This is proving difficult for repairs and maintenance due to the continued increase in the price of materials. The Repairs and Maintenance programme is constantly under review to keep within budget. However, there is a risk that unexpected events may occur which require expenditure to be incurred, that has not been allocated for.

The Asset Management Service has incurred one off expense this year, due to the vacant unit at The Hive, which was previously occupied by Frankie & Benny's. Costs relating to NNDR, Repairs and Maintenance and Service Charges have had to be paid by HBC until the unit is leased.

As a result of Tarmac taking up occupancy at Unit 10 Catalyst Park, the Council has received a NNDR refund of £30k. Projections have been updated with regards to NNDR costs at the Markets.

Due to the energy costs budget increasing significantly in 2023/24, the department is forecasting that it will be £0.262m under budget in year as costs have not risen as much as expected, but costs are still predicted to be £0.461m higher than 2022/23, which is an increase of over 43%. The forecast may change during the following quarter depending on the change in energy usage over this time.

A stop on non-essential supplies and services budgets has contributed to the under spend for the Department. It is anticipated that the budget will be under budget by £44k at year end.

This financial year has witnessed an increase in the security costs. This is due not only to inflation, but the need for additional security in Halton Lea, due to anti-social behaviour. The need for security at all locations is reviewed on a regular basis and if necessary, advice is provided from the Police.

As in previous years, and the long recovery from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the financial challenges of commercial property rent continue to present a significant financial challenge, though the third quarter of the year has seen an increase in the amount of commercial property income. This is due to Agency Staff within Asset Management being able to focus on the rent reviews and licence fees. There is also a focus within the team to fill the vacant properties within the portfolio. The current projection is that the income target will not be achieved by £0.050m.

Due to adverse trading conditions in the retail sector which have been made worse due to inflation and increased utilities costs, the department is projecting to under achieve on market rental income targets this budget year. The occupancy rate is approximately 89%. The School Cleaning Service Level Agreement (SLA) is not covering its costs this budget year due to the need to employ agency staff to cover sickness and leave and the pay award. A review of SLA charges has been undertaken ahead of the next budget year. The demand for the service is also decreasing as schools move to Academies.

Approved 2023/24 Savings

Please see Appendix A for details of progress towards achieving budget efficiency savings agreed by Council in February 2023.

ECONOMY ENTERPRISE & PROPERTY DEPARTMENT

Capital Projects as of 31 December 23

	Capital Allocation £'000	Allocation to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Total Allocation Remaining £'000
Expenditure				
3MG	24	14	14	10
Murdishaw	30	8	8	22
Equality Act Improvement Works	282	230	230	52
Kingsway Learning Centre Improved Facilities	36	0	0	36
Halton Lea TCF Roof Top Garden	35	0	0	35
Property Improvements	254	210	210	44
Waterloo Building Runcorn	93	1	1	92
Woodend - Former Unit 10 Catalyst Trade Park	200	234	234	-34
Foundry Lane Residential Area	2,634	1,308	1,308	1,326
Police Station Demolition	406	406	406	0
Runcorn Station Building Development	80	30	30	50
UK Shared Prosperity Fund	82	20	20	62
Runcorn Waterfront Residential Development	291	18	18	273
Changing Places	212	180	180	32
Town Deal	2,240	825	825	1,415
Total Capital	6,899	3,484	3,484	3,415

Murdishaw – HBC supported the capital works to the former Youth Centre/Boxing Club which has been brought back in to use as the Tea Tree Café, a community project supported by Onward Homes. The funding was provided to match fund Onward Homes contribution. A programme of improvements to the external facilities at Murdishaw Community Centre is currently being priced with works anticipated in the Quarter 4.

Equality Act Budget - It is anticipated that most of the budget will be spent by year end, as the department has some access improvement works which are adjacent to the Brindley yet to be invoiced.

Kingsway Learning Centre – A PA system was recently installed in the building. The department is awaiting the final invoice.

Property Improvements- It is anticipated that this budget will be fully spent by year end. The department has already completed a number of projects from this fund, inclusive of the heating/ventilated replacement works at Phoenix Park, the installation of the new safety barrier system, and the new audio equipment at the Brindley and we have allocated the Halton Lea lift replacement project to this code, so all will be spent by year end.

Waterloo Centre - The demolition works are likely to commence in February, the Council a date for the disconnection of the services which is late January. The anticipated cost of the work is circa £115k plus fees.

Woodend Former Unit 10 - All works are complete other than the provision of the new gas supply.

Foundry Lane – Foundry Lane is moving to a crucial stage with reserved matters to enable the beginning of construction on the site. Planning permission should be determined in January to allow the construction company to start on site by the end of this financial year.

Police Station Demolition – Legal are in the process of finalising the overage payment for Cheshire Police

Runcorn Station Building Development –A detailed delivery programme up to Approval in Principal stage has been produced and is 3 weeks ahead of schedule. A sponsor’s instruction has also been sent to partners to be signed off.

UKSF – Halton submitted an Investment Plan to the CA for three strands of its UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) programme – Town Centres; Local Culture, Arts and Heritage; Green, Resilient, Safe Communities. This amounts to £608k up to March 2025 and is a mix of capital and revenue.








Runcorn Waterfront Development - Preparation work is currently ongoing in respect of getting all the tender documentation ready to go through a procurement exercise in respect of the demolition of both Belvedere and Churchill Hall. It is hoped that the tender documents will be issued via the Chest in November with a realistic start on site not being until the New Year.

Changing Places - All 3 changing places facilities are complete, bar a few minor snags at the Victoria Park facility. The department is still in the process of getting them all registered on the Changing places website, all will be complete by year end.

The Town Deal programme –The seven projects which make up the Runcorn Town Deal programme are progressing and are currently on track to be completed by 31st March 2026 when the funding ends.

3MG - The substantive programme for 3MG in terms of land disposals is now 90%+ complete with up to 900,000 square foot of development in the pipeline some of which will require professional support over the coming years which will continue this as an ongoing project.




**ECONOMY, ENTERPRISE AND PROPERTY DEPARTMENT
APPENDIX A**

Ref.	Service Area	Net Budget £'000	Description of Saving Proposal	Savings Value			Current Progress	Comments
				23/24 £'000	24/25 £'000	25/26 £'000		
EEP1	Capital Works Team	N/A	Increase the level of fee income by increasing the percentage charged or charging by time, including those works not currently charged for.	10	0	0		On target.
EEP4	Cleaning Services – Council Buildings	580	Review cleaning arrangements, with a focus on only emptying bins and cleaning toilets daily.	0	100	0		Until the accommodation review is complete, only limited savings will be made in 2024/25
EEP2	Caretaking & Security Services	641	A review and restructuring of caretaking arrangements.	0	52	0		Restructure will take place in 24/25. It is anticipated the full saving will not be met in year. Cannot achieve savings for security due to anti-social behaviour in Halton Lea. Police have advised security is kept on site until this is resolved.
			Reduce security cover at Halton Lea for opening/closing and then static guarding 7.00am to 7.30pm Monday to Friday, and 9.30am to 3.00pm on Saturdays to cover the opening hours of Halton Direct Link.	35	0	0		
EEP5	Corporate Buildings	927	Generate additional rental income by providing additional office space for external organisations at Rutland House, by letting out the remaining three floors.	120	0	0		Reflected in 2023/24 budget.
EEP6	Facilities Management	165	Restructure the team in light of an expression of interest for retirement.	44	0	0		Reflected in 2023/24 budget.
EEP8	Technical Support & Market Team	392	Restructuring of the team	98	0	0		Reflected in 2023/24 budget.
Total Economy, Enterprise & Property Department				307	152	0		




8.0 Application of Symbols

Symbols are used in the following manner:

Progress Symbols

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Objective</u>	<u>Performance Indicator</u>
Green 	Indicates that the <u>objective is on course to be achieved</u> within the appropriate timeframe.	<i>Indicates that the annual target <u>is on course to be achieved</u>.</i>
Amber 	Indicates that it is <u>uncertain or too early to say at this stage</u> whether the milestone/objective will be achieved within the appropriate timeframe.	<i>Indicates that it is <u>uncertain or too early to say at this stage</u> whether the annual target is on course to be achieved</i>
Red 	Indicates that it is <u>highly likely or certain</u> that the objective will not be achieved within the appropriate timeframe.	<i>Indicates that the target <u>will not be achieved</u> unless there is an intervention or remedial action taken.</i>

Direction of Travel Indicator

Green 	Indicates that performance is better as compared to the same period last year.
Amber 	Indicates that performance is the same as compared to the same period last year.
Red 	Indicates that performance is worse as compared to the same period last year.
N / A	N / A
	Indicates that the measure cannot be compared to the same period last year.