

ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Environment and Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board on Wednesday, 12 February 2025 at the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Woolfall (Chair), P. Lloyd Jones (Vice-Chair), Hughes, Hutchinson, K. Loftus, Ryan and Thornton

Apologies for Absence: Councillor L. Nolan, Skinner, Stockton and Wall

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: S. Burrows, A. Plant, R. Taylor and F. Harris

Also in attendance: None

ITEM DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

EUR21 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2024 having been circulated were signed as a correct record.

EUR22 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

It was confirmed that no public questions had been received.

EUR23 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES

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

RESOLVED: That the Minutes be received.

EUR24 BUILDING SAFETY LEVY

Members of the Board received a report from the Executive Director – Environment and Regeneration, which provided an update on the new Government initiatives and associated regulatory burdens.

It was noted that the purpose of the Building Safety Levy (BSL) was to introduce a charge imposed on developers of new residential buildings to fund the remediation of unsafe buildings, particularly those with cladding issues, post Grenfell. The Levy would ensure that developers bear the cost of fixing building safety issues and would be introduced in Spring 2025.

The report and the accompanying presentation described how the BSL would work, the exemptions inclusions and discounts and how the charges would be collected and paid to the Department.

It was agreed that a copy of the presentation slides would be circulated to Members after the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Board receive a presentation

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

EUR25 HALTON LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (LDS)

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment and Regeneration, on the proposed update to the Local Development Scheme (LDS). This needed to be submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government by 6 March 2025. The LDS informed work required to maintain a Local Plan, in line with National Policy.

Halton's Local Plan consisted of the adopted Delivery and Allocations Local Plan (2022) and the Joint Waste Plan (2013). The statutory Local Development Plan was the set of Local Plans that together formed the statutory basis to determine whether or not planning permission should be granted.

The LDS underpinned Halton's Delivery and Allocations Local Plan, which provided a timetable of works to be undertaken in 2025/26.

Once the LDS had been approved by the Executive Board, it would be made available on the Council's website.

RESOLVED: That the Board endorse the draft Local Development Scheme and agree its submission to Executive Board for approval.

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

EUR26 PEST CONTROL – REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES

The Board received a report from the Director of

Public Health regarding a review of fees and charges for Pest Control services. The report set out the services undertaken by the Environmental Health Team which comprised the control of rats in the Borough. This included the provision of rat treatments to domestic premises, which was currently free of charge. However, it was proposed to introduce a charge to cover these costs with effect from April 2025. The team also provided treatments for nuisance pests such as mice, ants and wasps, however, there was a charge for this service.

Members were advised of the risks of introducing a fee, however, in response to the Council's budget position, a number of proposals had been put forward for consideration and one such proposal was to introduce a charge for the provision of rat treatments on domestic properties.

It was noted that all Cheshire and Merseyside local authorities had retained an in-house pest control service and most now charge for rat treatments, although some still offered a free service. A breakdown of this information was included in section 3.8 of the report.

The cost of rat treatments by a private contractor would range between £120-£240. The actual cost of providing an average rat treatment in Halton had been calculated as £45.60 (including VAT). The Council currently received over 2,500 requests for rat treatments each year and this number had increased gradually year on year.

Members were asked to consider a proposal to introduce a fee of £45.60, with effect from April 2025 for all rat treatments on domestic properties and noted that:

- There would be no reductions or concessions, as applying a means test to the service would significantly increase administration costs;
- The proposal would disproportionately impact low-income households;
- The proposed fee had been set as low as possible and was considerably less than using a private contractor;
- Removal of free rat treatments was likely to lead to an increase in enforcement work for the Environmental Health Team;
- There was a risk that a reduction in rat treatments would lead to an increase in rat activity in the Borough; and
- A full list of fees and charges for domestic pest control was set out in section 5.6 of the report.

Members noted and discussed the report and further to questions, the following additional information was provided:

- Residents affected by rat problems from neighbouring properties e.g. derelict buildings, would not have to pay for treatments. However, the Council would take legal action against the owner of the problematic premises and this would incur charges to the Council;
- 95% of rat treatments were provided to domestic properties; a small amount of work was for schools or Council buildings. Going forward new job codes would be created to ensure the impact of the proposal could be measured; and
- 75% of rat problems were currently reported via the Council's website and 25% went through the Contact Centre. If a means tested benefit was applied, those affected would have to go through the Contact Centre and therefore, this would add work to the Contact Centre, which in turn would apply hidden costs.

Some Members of the Board expressed their concerns about the proposed charges and the impact this would have on low income households, as well as the health and safety implications for all residents of the Borough. It was also suggested that some people who have rat problems also use bird feeders, which can attract rats, and therefore, Members asked if some educational information could be made available to the public.

Following discussions, the Board agreed that recommendation (1) of the report be amended to "endorse the proposal to introduce a new fee that recovers the full cost of rat treatments on domestic properties, with the exception for those in receipt of benefits (subject to proof)".

They also requested that a further update report be brought back to the Board in November 2025.

RESOLVED: That the Board:

- 1) endorse the proposal to introduce a new fee that recovers the full cost of rat treatments on domestic properties, with the exception for those in receipt of benefits (subject to proof); and
- 2) recommend that the proposal is taken forward by Executive Board and Council, as part of the budget setting process for 2025/26.

Director of Public Health

EUR27 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORTS FOR QUARTER 3 OF 2024/25

The Board received the Performance Monitoring Report for Quarter 3 of 2024/25.

The key priorities for development of improvement in 2024/25 were agreed by Members and included in Directorate Plans for the various function areas reported to the Board as detailed below:

- Development and Investment Services;
- Highways and Transportation, Logistics and Development Services; and
- Waste and Environmental Improvement and Open Space Services.

The reports detailed progress against service objectives and milestones, and performance targets and provided information relating to key developments and emerging issues that had arisen during the period.

RESOLVED: That the Performance Management report for quarter 3 of 2024/25 be received.

EUR28 COUNCILWIDE SPENDING AS AT 30 NOVEMBER 2024

The Board received a copy of a report, which was presented to the Council's Executive Board on 16 January 2025. The report outlined the Council's overall revenue and capital spending position as at 30 November 2024, together with the latest 2024/25 outturn forecast. The report also described the reasons for key variances from budget.

The Executive Board had requested that a copy of the report be shared with each Policy and Performance Board for information, to ensure that all Members had a full appreciation of the Councilwide financial position, in addition to their specific areas of responsibility.

It was noted that Environment and Regeneration was the only Directorate still working within budget.

RESOLVED: That the Councilwide financial position as outlined in the report be noted.

Meeting ended at 7.16 p.m.