

ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25

ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

**Councillor Bill
Woolfall
Chair**

The role and remit of the PPB is wide ranging and covers topics that affect everyone across the Borough every day, for example road safety, waste management, housing, and green spaces, to name just a few. The Board has covered a variety of specialist themes and topics during the last 12 months. I hope that the short summary outlined in this annual report adequately reflects this.

I am grateful, as always, to PPB Members for their enthusiasm and valuable contributions at our meetings. The quality of the discussions is always impressive, giving the PPB a vital role in informing and improving the Council's policies and procedures, and ensuring value for money in the delivery of the services provided to Halton's residents and businesses.

This last year has seen further progress towards tackling climate change, enhancing sustainable travel choices, improving housing standards, and enhancing environmental quality. I am proud the Board continues to shape and champion project such as these.

MEMBERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Board is comprised of eleven Councillors: -

Councillor Bill Woolfall (Chair)
Councillor Peter Lloyd Jones (Vice Chair)
Councillor Colin Hughes
Councillor Noel Hutchinson
Councillor Kath Loftus
Councillor Louise Nolan
Councillor Mike Ryan
Councillor Aimee Skinner
Councillor Gareth Stockton
Councillor Sharon Thornton
Councillor Andrea Wall

The primary function of the Environment and Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board (EUR PPB) is to focus on the work of the Council and its partners in enhancing the local environment and championing the urban renewal / regeneration of Halton. The Board reviews Executive Board decisions relevant to its remit and monitors the general activities and performance of Council departments against service plans.

The Board scrutinises performance and formulates policy in relation to the following areas:

- Highways, Transportation and Logistics (including road maintenance, street, lighting, road safety, traffic management, supported bus services and flood risk management)
- Waste Management and Waste Strategy
- Environment Services, Parks & Countryside, Cemeteries & Crematoria
- All aspects of the Council's Planning Policies that comprise the Development Plan
- Economic Regeneration, Business Development and Tourism Strategies
- Major Schemes
- Derelict / Contaminated Land Strategy
- Biodiversity
- Climate Change
- Transportation Policies (Local Transport Plan)
- Housing Strategic Policy Area renewal, availability, choice and mix.
- Urban renewal aspects of the Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Plan
- Physical Environment including powers and duties of Lead Local Flood Authorities,
- Regulatory Services
- Natural Environment

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

The Board met 3 times during the Municipal Year 2024/25:

- 18th September 2024
- 13th November 2024
- 12th February 2025

Some of the main activities and issues that have come before the Board during the year are set out below.

ENVIRONMENT

Regeneration in Halton

A presentation was provided by the Deputy Leader on the Runcorn Town Plan and the seven projects contained in the plan. Further information was received on the emerging proposals for the Runcorn Long Term Plan Funding that was announced earlier in the year.

The presentation also included key regeneration sites in Widnes such as the Town Centre, Kingsway Quarter, Widnes Waterfront, the Multi Modal Gateway 3MG, HBC Field including the recently designated Freeport.

Town Deal Programme Update

An overview was provided on the programme including funding allocation and spend and progress on projects, such as Reconnecting Runcorn Programme; Runcorn Station Quarter (Elite House; Unlock Runcorn – landscaping and visitor centre and canal boat trip experience; Brindley Theatre Enhancements; Creative and Digital Skills Centre; Town Centre New Homes – High Street and Rutland Street; Health and Education Hub and High Street Connectivity).

Houses in Multiple Occupation and the Private Rental Sector

An update was provided on the progress of the Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) action plan that had been endorsed by the board in February 2023. An update was provided on the development of policies relating to the wider private rental sector.

Stray Dog Collection and Kennelling Service

The Council's current contractor had provided a kennelling service for the Council for over 10 years, but they did not want to renew their contract when it expired on 31st May 2024. The Council had 12 weeks' notice and was unable to procure a new contract under the tender process. Acorn Kennels in Shropshire were identified as a potential provider, and steps were taken to ensure that they would offer a suitable service. Any dogs that could not be returned to their owner would be taken to the licenced kennels in Shropshire which had a 5-star rating by their Local Authority. As the Kennels are some distance from Halton changes had to be made to the fees charged to attempt to reduce the number of dogs that had to be taken to the kennels. By law, an owner must reclaim their dog within 7 days after this period the Council can gift the dog to an organisation that would be able to look after the dog. Acorn Kennels offer a rehoming service so after the 7-day period any unclaimed dogs would be gifted to them with the expectation that as many dogs as possible would be found a new home.

Council Fly Posting and Banner Advertisements

The Council has powers available under Section 224 and 225 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to control fly posting and banner advertisements. Officers had been notified that there had been a proliferation of banner advertisements being fixed to highway furniture that could potentially cause highway safety issues and effect the amenity of the area. An overview was provided on the powers and the purposes and implications in the event of them being exercised. Due to limited resources officers would focus on being proactive in areas where it was affecting the amenity of the area. Officers would work with colleagues in other departments to carry out this work and at least 14 hours a month would be allocated to tackle this problem and take enforcement action.

Environmental Fund Update

Following the agreed planning permission for the Runcorn Thermal Power Station (TPS) in 2008 the plant became subject to a legal agreement under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The agreement contained the provision that the owner of the plant agreed to pay the Council an annual lump sum for every tonne of fuel received and processed. The fund has been in operation since 2015 and to date had generated £6,909,919.76. A list of the projects that had benefitted from this fund was provided.

Pest Control – Review of Fees and Charges

Environmental Health provide a service for nuisance pests such as mice, ants and wasps for a fee. They also provide provision for rat treatments to domestic residents free of charge. A proposal was made to charge for the treatment of rats in the borough from April 2025, the proposed amount was £45.60, a private contractor could cost £120-240. The Council received over 2,500 requests for rat treatments each year and the number increased each year.

URBAN RENEWAL

Building Safety Levy

Update provided on the new Government initiatives and associated regulatory burdens. The purpose the Building Safety Levy 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 ensures that the developers bear the cost of fixing building safety issues, it would be introduced in Spring 2025.

Halton Local Development Scheme

Proposed update on the Local Development Scheme submission was required to be made to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government by 6th March 2025. The Local Development Scheme informed of the 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 planning permission should be granted.

The Local Development Scheme underpinned Halton's Delivery and Allocations Plan that provided a timetable of works to be undertaken 25/26.

TRANSPORT

Local Transport Plan 4

An overview was provided on the draft Local Transport Plan 4 (LTPF4) and the consultation process. The aim of the plan was to provide transport choices that are safe, inclusive, affordable and low carbon. The plan would address the gaps in the current transport network that needed to be challenge. To decarbonise transport by 2040 there is significant change to the way we travel and transport freight and goods.

The plan has five goals and eight core principles plus details of policy approaches and the proposed interventions across the range of transport challenges.

Halton Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

Update on the completion of a Halton specific Local Cycling and Walking infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) document. Travel patterns and proposed cycle networks and walking routes of the borough explained. Schemes identified in the document that were nearing completion or ready to bring forward are: Runcorn Daresbury - completed, Runcorn Busway, Silver Jubilee Bridge to Sandy Lane / Knowsley boundary – completed, Wilmere Lane / Birchfield Road.

The LCWIP document sets out the structure and the strategic direction and allows the development and delivery of a planned active travel network for Halton over a ten-year period for its resident's workers and visitors. The routes would offer safe and convenient alternatives for walking and cycling and had been prioritised based on elements such as new connectivity to new developments; existing population; employment services; air quality issues and deliverability. Helping to also reduce transport emissions and health improvements.

Department for Transport Statistical Update 2023

Road Safety statistics released by the Department for Transport (DfT) through the publication of the 2023 Comprehensive Annual Report, showed full details of the number of traffic collisions and casualties in 2023 and compared figures from the previous years. Overall, there had been a small rise in the number of casualties, in contrast to the national picture there had been a slight decrease and traffic flow had been comparable for the first time since the pandemic.

Halton had achieved its performance targets set by the DfT; there were 158 road traffic collisions involving personal injury within Halton which was one more than the previous year. The incidents had resulted in 195 casualties a 4% increase on the 2022 figure but 22% below 2019 when traffic levels were comparable.

The Road Safety team would continue to cover road traffic collision reduction schemes, road safety education, training, and publicity as well as engaging with the Cheshire Police to target effective enforcement action.

Information was provided on the following safety initiatives:

- Gyroscopic Red Light Camera.
- Speed Camera A562 (Speke Road)
- "Smiley" Speed Indicative Device / sign (SiDs)
- Mobile Speed Camera Sites
- Collision sites
- Speed limit reduction.
- Safer Active Travel
- Road Safety Audits
- Education
- Halton 2025/26 Programme

Petition for Regent Road to become one way.

A petition containing 43 signatures requesting Regent Road be made a one-way street as a measure to reduce traffic flows and increase public safety was received. The petition was submitted during a time when a section of Appleton Village between Regent Road and Deacon Road had been closed for an extended period to allow for emergency utility works, and this had impacted on traffic to migrate onto adjacent roads including Regent Road.

Following the receipt of the petition activity was monitored on Regent Road and the surrounding areas and the findings had been explained.

Miscellaneous

Council Wide Spending as of 30 November 24

Information presented to Executive Board on 16th January 2025 was provided, outlining the Council's overall revenue and capital spending position as of 30th November 2024 together with the latest 24/25 outturn forecast. Reasons were provided for the key variances from budget. The only directorate operating within budget was the Environment & Regeneration Directorate.

DURING 2025/26 THE BOARD PLANS TO FOCUS ON:

Key themes started in 2024/25 will run on into the coming year.

- Responding to Climate Change
- Refreshing the Council's Housing Strategy
- Improving performance indicators with negative trends.

The board is also considering topics on:

- Tackling Industrial Odour
- Brownfield Land Strategy
- Tackling Fly Tipping

Contact Officer for the Board

Members of the public are welcome at the meetings of the Board. If you would like to know where and when meetings are to be held or if you would like any more information about the Board or its work please contact Tim Gibbs, Director Planning and Transportation on 0151 511 7664 or via email tim.gibbs@halton.gov.uk