

EXECUTIVE BOARD

At a meeting of the Executive Board on Tuesday, 25 February 2025 in The Boardroom, Municipal Building

Present: Councillors Wharton (Chair), Ball, Dennett, Harris, M. Lloyd Jones, Nelson, P. Nolan, Thompson and Wright

Apologies for Absence: Councillor T. McInerney

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: G. Cook, M. Reaney, E. Dawson, S. Wallace-Bonner, Z. Fearon, G. Ferguson, H. Roberts and D. Cooke

Also in attendance: None

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER POWERS AND DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

	<i>Action</i>
EXB82 MINUTES	
The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2025, were taken as read and signed as a correct record.	
LEADER'S PORTFOLIO	
EXB83 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2025/26	
The Board received a report of the Chief Executive, which set out the proposed Calendar of Meetings for the 2025/26 Municipal Year, which was appended to the report for information.	
RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to approve the Calendar of Meetings for the 2025/26 Municipal Year, as appended to the report.	
EXB84 URGENT DECISIONS	Chief Executive
The Board received a report from the Chief Executive, which provided information on urgent decisions taken since the last meeting of the Board.	
It was noted that the Council's Constitution gave	

authority to the Chief Executive to take urgent decisions, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Director Finance and/or the Director Legal and Democratic Services, where necessary.

Two urgent decisions had been made since the last meeting of the Board and full details were published on the Council's website.

RESOLVED: That the urgent decisions taken since the last meeting of the Executive Board be noted.

CORPORATE SERVICES PORTFOLIO

EXB85 BUDGET 2025/26 - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report from the Director, Finance, which outlined a recommendation to Council in respect of the Budget, Capital Programme and Council Tax for 2025/26.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), approved at the Executive Board meeting on 14 November 2024, had identified a funding gap of around £38.1m in 2025/26, £14.5m in 2026/27, £7.3m in 2027/28 and £9.3m in 2028/29. The Strategy had the following objectives:

- Deliver a balanced and sustainable budget;
- Prioritise spending towards the Council's priority areas;
- Avoid excessive Council Tax rises;
- Achieve significant cashable efficiency gains;
- Protect essential front line services and vulnerable members of the community; and
- Deliver improved procurement.

In terms of consultation, it was noted that the Council used various methods to listen to the views of the public, and Members own experiences through their Ward work was an important part of that process. Individual consultations were taking place in respect of specific budget proposals and equality impact assessments would be completed where necessary.

The Board received regular reports detailing spending in the current year against the budget. The latest report indicated that spending was forecast to be over budget in the current year by approximately £20.757m against a net budget of £149.496m.

The proposed revenue budget for 2025/26 totalled £183.052m; the departmental analysis of this was shown in Appendix B along with a breakdown of these changes in Appendix C. A total of £1.349m of savings were approved by Council on 1 February 2023. Further savings of £6.876m had been proposed for 2025/26 financial year and were detailed in Appendix G.

Table B in the report demonstrated the Council position where it is unable to present a balanced 2025/26 budget without seeking Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) from Government. Receipts from Council Tax and Business Rates were insufficient to fund the forecast net spend for 2025/26. At its meeting on 4 December, Council approved that an application for EFS be made to Government. The submission included an ask for EFS for 2024/25 £20.8m and for 2025/26 £32m. Provisional approval for the EFS application was still awaited but it was expected to be received in late February 2025.

The Board was advised that the proposed budget incorporated the grant figures announced in the Local Government Finance Settlement. It included £0.181m for the New Homes Bonus grant, an increase of £0.057m from 2024/25. The budget also included Better Care Funding of £8.614m which was unchanged from 2024/25. Additional funding for Adult's and Children's Social Care was announced as part of the provisional grant settlement. The 2025/26 grant allocation of £17.744m was inclusive of an additional allocation of £2.718m awarded for the forthcoming year. This funding would be included in the Council budget to help fund existing pressures within Social Care services. Table C in the report provided an updated position of grants announced at the settlement and how the allocation compared to 2024/25.

Further information was also provided on the budget outlook, Halton's Council Tax, Parish precepts, Police, Fire and Liverpool City Region (LCR) Mayor precepts, the Capital Programme, Prudential Code and School Budgets.

Reason(s) for Decision

To seek approval for the Council's revenue budget, capital programme and council tax for 2025/26.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

A number of alternative budget proposals have been considered by the Budget Working Group.

Implementation Date

5 March 2025.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended

Director
Finance

of

- 1) to adopt the resolution set out in Appendix A, which includes setting the budget at £183.052m, the Council Tax requirement of £68.208m (before Parish, Police, Fire and LCR Combined Authority precepts) and the Band D Council Tax for Halton of £1,846.66;
- 2) to approve the capital programme set out in Appendix E;
- 3) to approve the use of Capital Receipts Strategy as set out in Appendix H;
- 4) to approve the budget savings set out in Appendix G; and
- 5) to approve 100% Council Tax premium being applied to properties which have been unoccupied and unfurnished for a minimum period of 12 months.

EXB86 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT
2025/26

The Board received the Treasury Management Strategy Statement, (TMSS) which incorporated the Annual Investment Strategy (AIS) and the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Strategy for 2025/26.

The TMSS was appended to the report and detailed the expected activities of the treasury function in the forthcoming financial year (2025/26). Its production and submission to Council was a requirement of the CIPFA Prudential Code and the CIPFA Treasury Management Code.

The Local Government Act 2003 required the Council to have regard to the Prudential Code and to set Prudential Indicators for the next three years, to ensure that the Council's capital investment plans were affordable, prudent and sustainable.

The Act therefore required the Council to set out its treasury strategy for borrowing and to prepare an Annual Investment Strategy (AIS), which set out the Council's policies for managing its investments and for giving priority

to the security and liquidity of those investments. Government guidance notes stated that authorities could combine the TMSS and the AIS into one report, which the Council had done and was included in Section 4.

Members noted that the production of a Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement was required and a formal statement for approval was contained within the report at paragraph 2.3, with the full policy shown in Appendix A.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to adopt the policies, strategies, statements, prudential and treasury indicators outlined in the report.

Director of
Finance

EXB87 CAPITAL STRATEGY 2025/26

The Board considered a report of the Director – Finance, on the Council’s Capital Strategy for 2025/26.

It was reported that all councils were required to produce a Capital Strategy annually, the aim of which was to ensure that the Council understood the overall long-term policy objectives and resulting capital strategy requirements, governance procedures and risk appetite.

Members were advised that the Capital Strategy should be read in conjunction with the Treasury Management Strategy Statement, included on the same agenda. This detailed the expected activities of the treasury management function and incorporated the Annual Investment Strategy (AIS) and the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy for 2025/26. It was noted that the successful delivery of the Capital Strategy would assist the Council in planning and funding its capital expenditure over the next three years.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to approve the 2025/26 Capital Strategy, as presented in the Appendix.

Director of
Finance

N.B. Councillor Wharton and declared an Other Registrable Interest in the following item of business as he is a Treasurer of Hale Youth Club. Councillor Dennett declared an Other Registrable Interest in the following item of business as he is a Treasurer of Halton Play Council.

EXB88 DISCRETIONARY NON-DOMESTIC RATE RELIEF RENEWALS

The Board received a report from the Director –

Finance, which advised that under the amended provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, the Council was able to grant discretionary rate relief to any business ratepayer. The report requested consideration be given for the renewal of discretionary business rate relief for existing registered charities, not for profit organisations, and community amateur sports clubs, who continued to satisfy the appropriate criteria.

The report outlined details of proposed changes to discretionary rate relief for these organisations. The Council currently granted discretionary business rate relief to organisations for a three-year period, and it was recommended that this practice would continue in order to provide the organisations with certainty to assist with their financial planning.

The Council was required to provide the organisations with twelve months' notice of any changes to their discretionary rate relief. Therefore, if approved the renewals will apply from 1 April 2026.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) discretionary business rate relief of 10% be granted for those registered charities and CASC organisations currently in receipt of such relief, for the period of three years commencing 1 April 2026, as listed in the Appendix; and
- 2) discretionary business rate relief of 75% be granted for those not-for-profit organisations currently in receipt of such relief (with 60% relief for one organisation as indicated), for the period of three years commencing 1 April 2026, as listed in the Appendix.

Director of Finance

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

EXB89 PERMISSION TO CONSULT HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT FOR PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS & DISABILITIES - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report which sought approval to commence a consultation with stakeholders and partners with a view to determining a new policy on sustainable travel and transport for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). In accordance with the DfE Statutory Guidance, provision of assisted home to school transport is for eligible SEND pupils of statutory

school age, 5-16 years of age. The Council currently provides a transport service to early years children and post 16 SEND students, which falls outside of their statutory duties.

The Board was advised that the number of SEND pupils requiring specialist transport had significantly increased over the past number of years. This was a trend that appeared to be replicated in every other local authority across the country. A comparison in Halton was provided in the report for between 2012 and 2024 for in Borough and out of Borough transport.

It was proposed that the Local Authority consults with parents/carers, educational establishments and other interested parties on revised travel solutions. The consultation would take the form of two parts:

Part A: Flexible travel arrangements and increasing independence

This would include, personal travel budgets, escalation of independent travel training, centralised picks ups and mobility vehicles.

Part B: Reviewing discretionary transport

This would include distance criteria, provision of transport for pupils under the age of 5 years, post 16 transport and governance changes.

Reason(s) for Decision

The report sought the Board's approval to commence a consultation with stakeholders and partners with a view to determining a new policy on sustainable travel and transport for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

The alternative option would be to not consult on Home to School Transport provision and continue with the current policy.

Implementation Date

June 2025 to report back to Executive Board.

RESOLVED: That the Board

1) note the report;

Executive Director
of Children's
Services

- 2) approve the commencement of a consultation with stakeholders and partners with regard to implementing a new Home to School and College Travel and Transport Policy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities from September 2025; and
- 3) confirm they support the overall process.

ADULT AND SOCIAL CARE PORTFOLIO

EXB90 SUPPORT AT HOME SERVICE IN HALTON – BRITISH RED CROSS

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director, Adults, which sought approval for a waiver in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 iv of Part 3 of Procurement Standing Orders, for a direct award to support the continuation of the provision of the Support at Home services in Halton, delivered through contract with British Red Cross for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2028. A breakdown of the key performance indicators of the Service provided by British Red Cross between January to December 2024, were set out in the Appendix to the report.

The total cost of the contract over a three-year term would be £260,013 (based on an annual contract value of £86,671).

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) note the contents of the report; and
- 2) approve a waiver in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 iv of Part 3 of Procurement Standing Orders, for a direct award to support the continuation of the provision of the Support at Home services in Halton delivered through contract with British Red Cross for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2028.

ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL PORTFOLIO

EXB91 HALTON LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (LDS)

In December 2024, the Deputy Prime Minister wrote to all Local Planning Authorities requesting an updated Local Development Scheme (LDS) be sent to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) by

Executive Director
of Adult Services

6 March 2025. The LDS informs work which was required to maintain a Local Plan, in line with National Policy.

The Board considered a request to delegate powers to the Director for Planning and Transport, in consultation with Portfolio Holders for Environment and Urban Renewal and Climate Change, to make editorial changes to the Local Development Scheme work plan prior to submission to the MHCLG.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) note the report;
- 2) approve the schedule of work within the LDS; and
- 3) give delegated powers to the Director of Planning and Transport, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Urban Renewal, for the final approval before submission on the 6 March 2025.

Director -
Planning and
Transportation

EXB92 SCHEDULE 12A OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

The Board considered:

- 1) whether Members of the press and public should be excluded from the meeting of the Board during consideration of the following item of business in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 because it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be considered, exempt information would be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972; and
- 2) whether the disclosure of information was in the public interest, whether any relevant exemptions were applicable and whether, when applying the public interest test and exemptions, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed that in disclosing the information.

RESOLVED: That as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed that in disclosing the information, members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business in

accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 because it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business, exempt information would be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

DEPUTY LEADER'S PORTFOLIO

EXB93 RUNCORN CREATIVE AND DIGITAL SKILLS CENTRE

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment and Regeneration, which provided information about the refurbishment of the current vacant historic properties 63-65 High Street, Runcorn, into a Creative and Digital Skills Centre, and subsequent leases of the building to both Mako Create and A Place for Us.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

EXB94 HALTON STADIUM MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment and Regeneration, which sought approval to include maintenance works at the Halton Stadium in the 2024-26 Capital Programme.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL PORTFOLIO

EXB95 COMPULSORY PURCHASE ORDER FOR LAND AT SCI-TECH DARESBURY - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment and Regeneration, which sought approval to exercise the Council's powers of compulsory purchase to enable the delivery of the extension to the Sci-Tech Daresbury campus and to enable the development of delivery land and interests to provide the subject site with vacant possession.

Reason(s) for Decision

A decision is required to enable the Council to agree to make use of its powers of compulsory purchase to acquire the land necessary to enable the delivery of the Sci-Tech Daresbury masterplan.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

The compulsory purchase of land is considered the best course of action to ensure that the land is available for the delivery of the scheme.

Implementation Date

Quarter 2 of 25/26

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the report be noted;
- 2) Council updates the Capital Programme to reflect the costs of the Scheme;
- 3) the Director – Legal and Democratic Services is authorised to make the Halton Borough Council (Sci-Tech Daresbury) Compulsory Purchase Order 2025 (“Order) pursuant to section 226 (1) (a) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and all other enabling powers, for the purposes of site assembly necessary to deliver the Scheme, and that the recommendations set out in paragraphs 2.3.2 – 2.3.10 of the report be approved;
- 4) the Executive Director, Environment and Regeneration, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, to: continue, in partnership with the Sci-Tech Daresbury Joint Venture, to negotiate with third parties alongside the progression of the CPO and, agree the terms of any acquisition, relocation or accommodation works required or the amount of any compensation payable with the JV as a result of the Order, including compensation for disturbance and upon possession of any land within the Order, to take the necessary steps to clear, secure or ensure such land as is necessary; and
- 5) the Director – Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Director – Economy, Enterprise and Property, is authorised to:
 - enter into other agreements with interested parties including agreements for the withdrawal of blight notices and/or the withdrawal of objections to the CPO including where appropriate seeking the exclusion of land or rights from the CPO, making provision for the payment of compensation and/or for relocation.

Director, Legal
and Democratic
Services

- Agree minor modifications to the Order or the Order Map to secure confirmation of the Order.

EXB96 FOUNDRY LANE RESIDENTIAL

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment and Regeneration, which provided an update on the Foundry Lane Residential scheme and sought approval:

- For the acquisition of the land required for Phase 2; and
- To accept the additional funding from Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) and enter into a new/addendum Grant Funding Agreement (GFA) to support the acquisition and development.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) authority be given to the Director Economy Enterprise and Property, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, to conclude the legal and funding arrangements for the acquisition of the Phase 2 required land;
- 2) authority be given to the Director Economy Enterprise and Property, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, to enter a new Grant Funding Agreement with LCRCA; and
- 3) the inclusion of the aforementioned items in the Capital Programme be approved.

Director Economy, Enterprise & Property -

MINUTES ISSUED: 27 February 2025

CALL-IN: 6 March 2025 at 5.00 pm.

Any matter decided by the Executive Board may be called in no later than 5.00pm on 6 March 2025.

Meeting ended at 3.07 p.m.