

Local Economy – Priority Based Monitoring Report Q1

Reporting Period: 1st April to 30th June

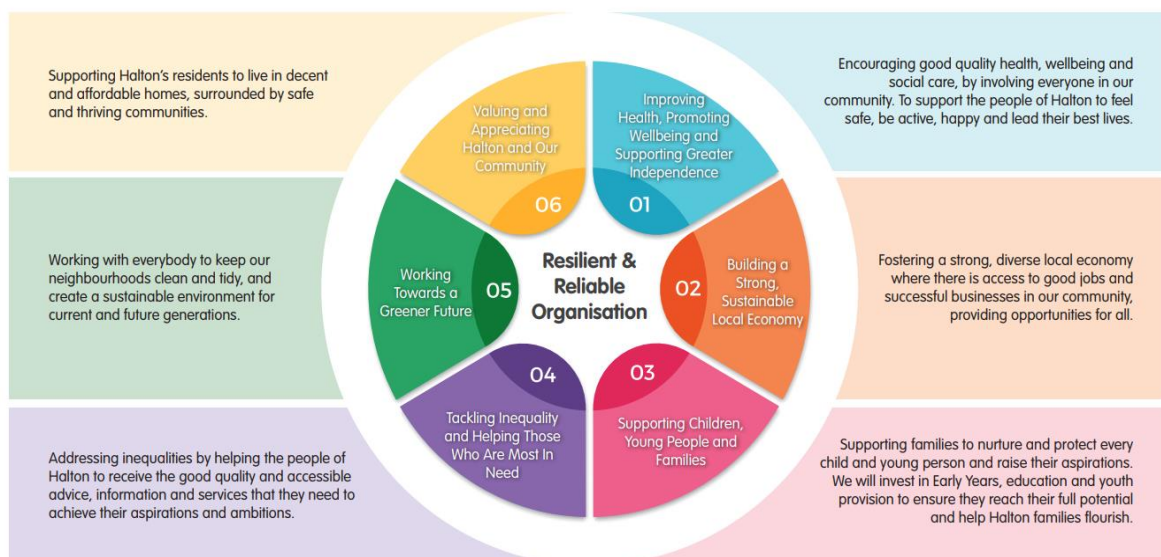
1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of issues and progress against key service objectives/milestones and performance targets, during the first quarter of 2025 / 26 for service areas within the remit of the Local Economy Policy and Performance Board.
- 1.2 Key priorities for development or improvement in 2025 - 26 were agreed by Members and included in Directorate Plans, for the various functional areas reporting to the Local Economy Policy and Performance Board.
- 1.3
- Employment, Learning and Skills
 - Library Services and other Culture & Leisure Services
- 1.4 The way in which traffic light symbols have been used to reflect progress to date is explained within Section 5 of this report.
- 1.5 Corporate Priorities



Halton Borough Council Corporate Plan 2024 – 2029
Our Community, Our Priorities, Our Future

Plan on a Page



2.0 High Priority Equality Actions

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 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>


3.0 Performance Overview




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.

Employment, Learning & Skills

Key Objectives / milestones




Corporate Priority	Priority Two – Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy. Priority Three – Supporting Children, Young People and Families. Priority Four – Tackling Inequality and Helping those who are most in need. Employment, Learning & Skills
ERD 08	To promote access to learning to those who need it most and create employment opportunities for Halton residents

Milestone	Progress Q1	Supporting Commentary
Deliver six accredited ESOL and two Pre-ESOL courses across Widnes and Runcorn to help our BAME residents improve their English skills between 1 st August 2024 and 31 st July 2025		Achieved – successfully delivery of six accredited ESOL courses and launched a new conversation club for over 30 residents.

Percentage of people engaged in Learning from most deprived areas increased from 29% to 48% by July 2025.		39.8% of Adult Learners in the 24/25 academic year were from targeted wards – those identified as having a higher proportion of economically inactive residents. Whilst this has increased by over 10% (and has increased from 37.4% since Q4 in 24/25), the service has not met its target
The % of residents accessing Halton Adult Learning courses and achieving will increase from 88% to 92% between 1 st August 2024 and July 2025.		Achievement rates: Tailored – 98.7%, ASF – 80%, Overall – 92.5% Significant improvement in Adult Skills Funded (ASF) areas (accredited, qualification based) this academic year, with more certificate claims to be processed over the summer break.
330 residents who access HPIJ employment programmes to obtain employment between April 2025 – March 2026.		72 residents were supported into work through HPIJ employment programmes in Q1. There were more job starts; however, we are awaiting evidence from employers for audit. Therefore, on target to achieve by end of Q4.








Library Services and Other Culture & Leisure Services





Corporate Priority	Priority One - Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence. Leisure Services
ERD 21	Community Assets – Capital Investment Projects

Milestone:	Progress Q1	Supporting Commentary
Brindley Enhancement completion Summer 2026. A soft launch of the building extension will take place in Spring 2026. This will include the transition of the Library including the full fit out. The completion of Brindley Green will follow by Summer 2026, along with the formal opening of Building and Green.	 	This is on target. Steelwork is up and external works are continuing. The building footprint is now taking shape. Planning permission has been granted for the Brindley Green, to incorporate St Paul's Mews area.
Runcorn Leisure Centre options report on provision by autumn 2025 to Executive Board.		This is on target, subject to resource capacity.



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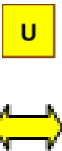



Corporate Priority	Priority One - Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence. Priority Two – Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy. Priority Three – Supporting Children, Young People and Families. Priority Four – Tackling Inequality and Helping those who are most in need. Leisure Services
ERD 22	Increase footfall at the Leisure Centres

Milestone:	Progress Q1	Supporting Commentary
% of memberships at Brookvale Recreation Centre (only)	 	Brookvale – Q1 saw a 2% increase in members compared to previous quarter. This is attributed to an increase in learn to swim members.
Footfall at Brookvale Leisure Centre Annual Target 210,000 for 25/26	 N / A	Recorded footfall in Q1 19,959 , however the centre has experienced technical difficulties in the attendance capture hence, this figure is significantly reduced and a not a true reflection of usage.
% memberships for Halton Leisure Centre (which incorporates access to Brookvale Recreation Centre)	 	Halton Leisure Centre - Q1 33% increase in members (including learn to swim) compared to previous quarter (noting HLC opened midway through Q4). Halton Leisure Centre – 122% increase in fitness memberships (excludes learn to swim) compared to Kingsway final figure.
Footfall at Halton Leisure Centre Annual target to be determined after one full operating year	 	Footfall in Q1 68,128 This figure is significantly below the actual visits however significantly increased from previous operating year. This does not include tours and visits, in addition the centre management system has experienced glitches with the access gates initially recognising bar codes and causing delays upon entrance hence, some teething issues with the new system has impacted full capture.


<p>Number of community classes at Frank Myler</p> <p>Target to deliver 1000 annually</p>	 	<p>Q1 total is 307, 250 community accessible indoor classes and 57 bookings for the multi-use games area (MUGA).</p> <p>Grass pitch bookings during the quarter: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 days • 6 evenings. <p>The Health Improvement Team continue to provide a falls prevention service weekly on a Monday.</p> <p>Other activity in the quarter: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 holiday activity camps • 1 walk leader training session • 2 learn to cycle scheme sessions on the car park
<p>Annual target 65% of service budget recovery for 25/26</p>	 	<p>49.83% in Q1, 62.48% was the total end of previous year position. The new leisure centre has seen increased usage and memberships however, full (actual) operating costs are yet to be understood. The anticipation is this will be more meaningful by mid-year.</p>





Corporate Priority	<p>Priority One - Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence.</p> <p>Priority Two – Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy.</p> <p>Priority Three – Supporting Children, Young People and Families.</p> <p>Priority Four – Tackling Inequality and Helping those who are most in need.</p> <p>Leisure Services</p>
ERD 23	Increase footfall at the Brindley

Milestone:	Progress Q1	Supporting Commentary
<p>Total number of tickets sold this quarter, including the cumulative in year quarter total.</p> <p>Annual target for 25/26 75,000 (18,750 per quarter)</p>	 	<p>15,727 tickets sold in Q1</p> <p>The enhancement works disruption, and the temporary access entrance were anticipated to affect attendances/performances throughout the period of construction.</p>








Total number of Theatre & Studio bookings this quarter.		Total of 84 bookings (available over 7 days a week) for theatre and studio in Q1, out of 170 available; this is related to large scale construction works and the significant impact for the Studio space
Theatre bookings this quarter of total % availability		78% achieved in Q1, 11 x theatre cancellations (dates not re-programmed due to construction works)
Studio bookings this quarter of total % availability		21% achieved in Q1, 18 bookings out of 85 available and 4 studio cancellations (with dates not re-programmed due to construction works)
75% of service budget recovery in 25/26		118.5% in this quarter presenting an over achievement on forecast; the ongoing construction work has impacted in previous quarters with last year's annual figure at 73.22%

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ERD 24	Increase footfall and e-access at the Libraries

Milestone:	Progress Q1	Supporting Commentary
Footfall for all libraries – Ditton, Widnes, Runcorn and Halton Lea. Quarterly target 70,000 Annual target 280,000		Q1 total 66,623 (total library footfall across 4 sites) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Runcorn = 5,062 • HLE = 24,252 • Widnes = 33,459 • Ditton = 3,850 Q2 usually has higher footfall, still aiming to achieve annual target.

<p>Total number of e-library digital <i>issues</i></p> <p>Quarterly target 1m</p> <p>Annual target 4m</p>	<p></p> <p></p>	<p>Q1 total 993,020</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ebook issues = 3,157 Eaudio issues = 8,107 Pressreader articles = 887,793 Ancestry = 1,777 Picture Halton = 92,186 <p>The trend in the Library service is e-issues tend to be lower in Q1 which has been experienced in recent operating years, anticipate achieving annual target.</p>
<p>Library book borrowing per site – Ditton, Widnes, Runcorn and Halton Lea</p> <p>Quarterly Target 50,000</p> <p>Annual Target 200,000</p>	<p></p> <p>N / A</p>	<p>Q1 total 44,068</p> <p>Ditton = 3,628 Halton Lea = 18,307 Runcorn = 4,201 Widnes = 17,932</p> <p>Target in Q1 not met; relocation of Runcorn library may be a contributory factor. A new KPI hence, comparator position will be demonstrated moving forward.</p>
<p>Number of attendances at Library events, both adults and children</p> <p>Annual Target 25,720</p>	<p></p>	<p>Q1 total 6,430; 2,821 children plus 3,609 adults attending a range of events i.e. rhyme time, story time, reading groups, IT clinics, Lego, dungeons & dragons, family history, coffee mornings, men's shed, crafting and themed events etc; the Library service offers a wide range of activities and ways to connect.</p>

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ERD 25	Increase footfall at the Community Centres to demonstrate levels of usage and demand for the Council's community assets.

Milestone:	Progress Q1	Supporting Commentary
<p>Monitor the number of users in attendance at the Community Centres (including drop-ins, events and hires).</p> <p>Quarterly Target 55,000 Annual Target 238,000</p>	 	<p>Q1 total 69,716</p> <p>Castlefields 10,298 Ditton 12,812 Grangeway 15,580 Murdishaw 8,987 Upton 22,039</p> <p>Numbers have increased this quarter and exceeded the quarterly target. New installation of counters at the main entrances of community centres is providing accurate data.</p>
<p>Community room / hall hires</p> <p>Quarterly Target 2175 Annual Target 8,700</p>	 	<p>Q1 total hires 2,501</p> <p>Castlefields 398 Ditton 561 Grangeway 503 Murdishaw 475 Upton 564</p> <p>All Centres are performing well for this time of the year with the bookings as expected. However, Q2 figures are anticipated to decrease due to sessions cancelling for the summer holidays.</p>
<p>Community Centres - Total number of centre organised events</p> <p>Quarterly Target 30 Annual Target 120</p>	 	<p>Q1 total 33</p> <p>The bingo sessions continue to run at Castlefield's and Upton. Grangeway held a summer fayre in June and Upton held a pop-up shop event. All five centres held celebrations for VE/VJ Day.</p>
<p>% of service budget recovery</p>	 <p>N / A</p>	<p>16.49% service budget recovery in quarter one, the end of previous year position was 27.11%; to be further considered in year as some income is completed annually.</p>

4.0 Financial Statements

ECONOMY ENTERPRISE & PROPERTY DEPARTMENT

Revenue Operational Budget at 31 May 25

	Annual Budget	Budget to Date	Actual Spend	Variance (Overspend)	Forecast Outturn
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Expenditure					
Employees	4,124	773	710	63	376
Agency - covering vacancies	0	0	85	(85)	(270)
Repairs & Maintenance	1,690	133	150	(17)	(98)
Premises	173	136	136	0	(1)
Energy & Water Costs	1,080	93	87	6	37
NNDR	659	629	629	0	0
Rents	157	0	0	0	1
Economic Regeneration Activities	88	0	0	0	0
Security	603	4	3	1	3
Supplies & Services	383	63	62	1	8
Supplies & Services - Grant	576	97	97	0	0
Grants to Voluntary Organisations	72	11	12	(1)	(1)
Total Expenditure	9,605	1,939	1,971	(32)	55
Income					
Fees & Charges Income	-561	-103	-103	0	0
Rent - Commercial Properties	-883	-158	-158	0	0
Rent - Investment Properties	-38	-8	-8	0	0
Government Grant	-594	-55	-55	0	0
Reimbursements & Other Grant Income	-120	-241	-241	0	0
Schools SLA Income	-55	0	0	0	0
Recharges to Capital	-454	0	0	0	0
Transfer from Reserves	-602	-522	-522	0	0
Total Income	-3,307	-1,087	-1,087	0	0
Net Operational Expenditure	6,298	852	884	(32)	55
Recharges					
Premises Support	2,738	456	456	0	0
Transport	26	5	5	0	0
Central Support	2,878	480	480	0	0
Asset Rental Support	4	0	0	0	0
HBC Support Costs Income	-9,342	-1,557	-1,557	0	0
Net Total Recharges	-3,696	-616	-616	0	0
Net Departmental Expenditure	2,602	236	268	(32)	55

Comments on the above figures

Finance communicates with the department on a regular basis to manage and analyse spending, identifying potential savings that could support current and future priorities. In an era of constrained budgets, achieving these goals is essential. The report forecasts that the department will be under the approved budget by £0.055m at year-end.

Supporting Information

Through diligent account monitoring, the success of utilising grant and external funding to alleviate pressure on the core budget is evident in employee expenses. Specific projects have been identified, and staff time has been allocated accordingly. Ensuring at all times that the department is compliant with the grant conditions. This approach will continue throughout the year.

To fulfil statutory and contractual obligations and support the borough's regeneration, maintaining a complete staff establishment is essential. However, the challenge of filling surveyor and project manager roles, even with a market supplement, continues to result in a lack of suitable candidates. Consequently, the engagement of agency personnel has been necessary, anticipated to cost £0.270m this financial year. Without these personnel, the borough's regeneration efforts would be hindered, potentially leading to a loss of business rates and council tax. Where possible, these costs are reimbursed through capital and external funding grants.

The recruitment of agency staff has increased commercial rental income by enabling the completion of pending rent reviews. All units at The Hive are now tenanted, which should result in this income budget being balanced for 25/26 providing there is no increase in inflation.

The costs associated with empty properties within the borough continue to be a budget pressure. In addition to the loss of rental income whilst the properties remain vacant, the department incurs additional costs for utilities, repairs, and maintenance. As of the end of May costs are £0.121m, although this does include annual NNDR charges so spend should not continue quite at this level. To reduce the expense, actions need to be taken to accelerate the leasing or explore temporary uses for properties, such as short-term rentals or community projects, which will generate some income and reduce costs. Some properties are in poor condition and require refurbishment before any letting could be considered.

Although the department has seen a significant increase in energy costs over the last few years, the department is forecasting that it will be £0.037m under budget by year-end.

The Repairs and Maintenance program is under continuous review to ensure it stays within budget. This financial year is particularly challenging because the 2025/26 budget did not include an inflation adjustment. An exercise was conducted with the service to distinguish between capital and revenue expenditures, and the budgets have been adjusted accordingly. Despite these adjustments, revenue expenditure is projected to exceed the budget by £0.098m by the end of the year.

Approved 2025/26 Savings

Please see Appendix A for details of progress towards achieving budget efficiency savings agreed by Council in March 25.

ECONOMY, ENTERPRISE AND PROPERTY DEPARTMENT

APPENDIX A

Service Area	Net Budget £'000	Description of Saving Proposal	Savings Value		Current Progress	Comments
			25/26 Agreed Council 01 February 2023 £'000	25/26 Agreed Council 05 March 2025 £'000		
Asset Management		Accelerate the lease or sale of surplus land, non-operational buildings, surplus space within building, etc. to either generate lease rentals or capital receipts to help fund capital schemes and thereby reduce future capital financing costs.	0	100	U	It is currently too early to establish if this can be achieved. Although all options will be explored.

Capital Budget at 31 May 25

Scheme Detail	2025/26 Original Allocation £000	2025/26 Revised Allocation £000	31 May Actual Spend £000	31 July Forecast Spend £000	30 Sept Forecast Spend £000	30 Nov Forecast Spend £000	31 Jan Forecast Spend £000	Cumulative Forecast Spend to 31 March 2026 £000
Equality Act Improvement Works	300.0	303.5	0.0	75.0	75.0	76.0	77.5	303.5
Foundry Lane Residential Area	2,639.5	3,381.3	470.8	80.8	200.0	248.4	2,000.0	3,381.3
Property Improvements	200.0	231.1	33.7	39.4	39.4	39.4	39.4	231.1
Town Deal	7,190.4	10,091.0	1,384.0	500.0	3,000.0	1,153.2	500.0	10,091.0
Port of Weston	3,940.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Sci-tech Daresbury Project Violet	2,200.0	2,200.0	0	0	0	0	0	2,200.0
Runcorn Waterfront Residential Development	0.0	82.0	0	0	0	0	0	82.0
Kingsway Leisure Centre Demolition	0.0	708.0	11	139.4	558.0	0.0	0.0	708.0
Changing Places	0.0	17.0	0	17	0	0	0	17.0
UK Shared Prosperity Fund	0.0	101.2	0	10	30	30	31.2	101.2
Total Economy, Enterprise & Property	16,469.9	17,115.1	1,899.3	166.4	588.0	30.0	31.2	17,115.1

Comments on above figures

Foundry Lane

Work has commenced on site.

Sci-Tech Daresbury Project Violet

Project Violet is currently being reviewed and a full business case is in development. The programme anticipates a procurement exercise and the revised delivery programme proposes a 26 month build with construction commencing in August 2025 and completion in Q4 2026.

Property Improvements-

Various works undertaken as and when required.

Changing Places

Works complete, retention monies left to pay.

Town Deal

Although at different stages work is progressing with all Town Deal funded projects.

1. The Brindley extension started on site August 2024, with the new drainage in place, foundation put down, steelwork up and new floors put in.
2. The youth centre -part of the Creative and Digital Skill centre - started September 2024, with the new build now well advanced including all external facades, and most steelwork in the wintergarden in place.
3. The Health Hub started work on site April 2025, after the library vacated to temporary location. The steelwork for the mezzanine is up, following installation of drainage.
4. The Runcorn Street art was delivered in May 2025.
5. The construction of the Temple Hall started March 2025, with foundation now complete.
6. The construction of two canal trip boats is underway at a boatyard in Liverpool.
7. The over 55s apartment block under construction at High Street is now receiving doors and windows, and external insulation.
8. Design work progresses on the remaining projects.

Kingsway Leisure Centre Demolition

The demolition works commenced in Spring 2025, following relocation of the Leisure Centre and period of decommissioning of the building.

Port of Weston

This scheme is no longer going ahead.

UKSPF

New reduced allocation for 25/26 which is for town centre improvements.

COMMUNITY AND GREENSPACES DEPARTMENT

Revenue Budget as at 31 March 2025

	Annual Budget £'000	Budget to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure					
Employees	15,296	2,506	2,410	96	580
Agency - in addition to establishment	16	16	69	(53)	(237)
Premises	3,304	416	440	(24)	(139)
Supplies & Services	3,101	258	287	(29)	(176)
Transport	117	2	4	(2)	(10)
Other Agency Costs	240	63	81	(18)	(111)
Other Expenditure	172	0	0	0	6
Waste Disposal Contracts	7,121	0	0	0	(22)
Grants to Voluntary Organisations	41	9	7	2	16
Transfers to Reserves	97	0	0	0	0
Total Expenditure	29,505	3,270	3,297	(27)	(93)
Income					
Sales Income	-1,342	-268	-275	7	42
Fees & Charges Income	-6,019	-1,524	-1,510	(14)	(89)
Rental Income	-1,111	-174	-159	(15)	(85)
Government Grant Income	-3,861	-1,288	-1,288	0	0
Reimbursement & Other Grant Income	-801	-115	-115	0	0
SLA Income	-23	0	0	0	0
Internal Fees Income	-223	0	-18	18	155
Capital Salaries	-236	-6	0	(6)	(35)
Transfers From Reserves	-30	0	0	0	0
Total Income	-13,646	-3,375	-3,365	(10)	(12)
Net Operational Expenditure	15,859	-105	-68	(37)	(105)
Recharges					
Premises Support	1,657	276	276	0	0
Transport	2,433	424	429	(5)	(29)
Central Support	4,297	716	716	0	0
Asset Rental Support	199	0	0	0	0
HBC Support Costs Income	-843	-141	-141	0	0
Net Total Recharges	7,743	1,275	1,280	(5)	(29)
Net Departmental Expenditure	23,602	1,170	1,212	(42)	(134)

Comments on the above figures

Net spend against the Community and Greenspaces department is forecast to be £0.134m over the approved budget profile by the end of the 2025/26 financial year.

Employee spend continues to be an area providing underspend for the department into the new financial year, forecast spend being £0.580m under the approved budget profile. There continue to be vacancies held for restructures taking place contributing to the underspend. However, due to the nature of the services within this department, agency and service expenditure will also rise in order to facilitate the very visible services provided to the residents of Halton.

In previous years Waste Disposal Contracts have contributed to an underspend for the department, however, due to the rise in costs last year, it is unlikely to see an underspend going forward.




As the size of the contracts are very large, small percentage changes to the invoices can have significant impacts on the outturn position of the department and with invoices being received several periods after the costs are incurred, the outturn position may change throughout the year.

Estimated spend on premises costs is forecast to be £0.139m over budget in 2025/26. Premises costs have been built into the 2025/26 budget for Halton Leisure Centre, which did provide an underspend in the previous financial year. Higher stadium utility costs were offset from this and therefore will continue to be a budget pressure this year. There is more focus on internal services that can be provided (See £0.155m overachieved Internal Fees Income at outturn), and should this continue it can be utilised to offset the premises costs going forwards.

Supplies and Services is forecasting an overspend of £0.176m which is a budget pressure throughout the Department, and is primarily caused by inflationary cost increases of key goods and services over recent years. There is a risk if the Council were to contain these costs within the budget profile there would be a reduction in the service provided.

One of the key pressures within the 2025/26 financial year, as Halton Leisure Centre is a new site there is potential that it does/does not meet budgeted expectations and could have significant impacts on the outturn position.




APPROVED BUDGET SAVINGS COMMUNITY AND GREENSPACES DEPARTMENT

Service Area	Net Budget £'000	Description of Saving Proposal	Savings Value		Current Progress	Comments
			25/26 Agreed Council 01 February 2023 £'000	25/26 Agreed Council 05 March 2025 £'000		
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 them to secure an alternative means of delivery, whether in-house or via an external provider.	12	0		School meals service has ceased and is reflected in the 25/26 budget.
Green Waste		Green Waste – increase green waste charges from £43 to £50 per annum, to bring Halton onto a comparable basis with charges levied by neighbouring councils.	0	100		Green waste charges have been increased to £50.
Area Forums		Area Forums – cease the funding for Area Forums.	0	170		Area forum budgets have been removed in 25-26
Total Community & Greenspace Dept			12	270		




5.0 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.