

CORPORATE AND INCLUSION POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Corporate and Inclusion Policy and Performance Board on Tuesday, 2 September 2025 in the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Gilligan (Chair), Philbin (Vice-Chair), Carlin, Davidson, Leck, Logan, McDermott, A. McInerney, C. Loftus and N. Plumptre Walsh

Apologies for Absence: Councillor McDonough

Absence declared on Council business: None.

Officers present: E. Dawson, J. Gallagher, K. Butler and I. Moorhouse

Also present: None.

**ITEM DEALT WITH
UNDER DUTIES
EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD**

Action

CS11 MINUTES

The Minutes from the meeting held on 3 June 2025 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

CS12 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Board was advised that no public questions had been received.

CS13 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES

The Board was presented with the minutes relating to the Corporate Services Portfolio, which had been considered by the Executive Board since the last meeting of the Board.

In response to a question from the Board, officers clarified that if something like a community centre was handed to a group from the Council, then they would pay business rates for it, however, if they had charitable status then they would get an 80% relief on rates. Additionally, they could ask the Council for an additional 10% relief on those rates.

Regarding 'health and leisure in Halton', a Board Member noted that there were no bowling facilities in areas like Victoria Park. They suggested that the Executive Board should look to include all aspects of leisure, especially for the active older generation.

CS14 STAFF SURVEY 2025 - THE NEXT STEPS

The Board considered the results of the 2025 Staff Survey as stated in the report. It was the first staff survey since 2019, and it was undertaken to see how the culture had changed and to try and address any staff issues that had arisen. All responses were anonymous, and work was done to initiate responses from non-laptop using members of staff with ballot boxes. Going forward, the initial responses will be analysed along with the text box answers by the Corporate Workforce Board. The Workforce Board will address the concerns raised by officers with those answers and alongside the directorate surveys going forward, will create an action plan to be rolled out to the whole Council.

The following additional information was provided in response to Member's questions:

- To encourage honest responses answering, anonymously was crucial.
- Responses to the survey came from all directorates were evenly spread and proportion to the size of the Directorate, with no big majority from any directorate. Pay grades were not asked as part of the survey.
- In the next survey, the Board suggested that they ask whether each department had a leadership culture and whether they were happy with it. They also suggested that it is asked how long the staff members had worked for the Council. They were keen to see how different departments understood work culture in their areas.
- In response, officers said that questions alluding to this will be included in other corporate and departmental staff surveys planned with Adults and Children's Social Care. All these surveys will be looked at by the Corporate Workforce Board. The Workforce Board may look at reoccurring issues raised and create a focus group to try to resolve the issues.
- There had not been a staff survey for six years because it felt inappropriate to ask for responses to their survey during a pandemic and staff priorities would have been elsewhere.

The Board noted that it was important to show members of staff that their comments made a difference, otherwise they would not respond to the survey again.

Staff sickness had increased from 2024 because the Council had an ageing workforce who would have some illnesses that younger officers do not and consequently these would tend to be of a longer nature. Stress was the main reason for absence in the workforce.

The Board reiterated that Officers should try to get more than 25% of the Council's workforce to respond to the next survey. They suggested a 'pulse' survey every 6 months and doing a 'you say we did' with the Working Board.

There was only a 19% response rate in 2005 but in 2019 there was a 46% response rate which was the highest amount received. Therefore, homeworking did not have an impact. Officers reiterated that they were keen to show staff members that they were actioning their comments.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CS15 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY

This item was deferred.

CS16 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORTS FOR
QUARTER 1 OF 2025/26

The Board considered a report on the performance in the first quarter of the Council term for 2025-2026 which detailed the progress made against objectives, milestones, and performance targets and provides information relating to key developments and emerging issues that have arisen during the period.

It was confirmed that the new Welfare Officers had started in the Benefits Team.

It was noted that there had been a significant improvement with the debt recovery, especially with Adult Social Care where most of the debt was. Additional staff had been brought into Adult Social Care to help resolve the debt issues for clients and families.

The Board suggested that the agency staff usage and costs be reviewed as there had not been a reduction in the usage of them. This was especially the case in Children's

Services; however, they had started work around this. It was agreed that the Head of HR could attend a future meeting to present an update on agency staffing and recruitment.

Regarding the One Stop Shops, the Board emphasised the need for these to remain to support service users who were not technologically confident.

Regarding the local market, the Board commented that work needed to be done to maintain it. The Board asked officers to check whether licences were still required for markets.

It was noted that some services are experiencing shortfalls in School SLA (service level agreement) income, meaning that full cost recovery is not being achieved. Consideration is therefore being given by those services as to whether to continue to offer the SLAs

The Board asked what the effect was following savings with school meal provisions on families and increasing green bin costs with fly tipping.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CS17 COUNCILWIDE SPENDING AS AT 31 MAY

The Board considered a report on the Council's overall revenue net spend position as of 31 May 2025 together with a 2025/26 forecast outturn position. The report was presented by the Director of Finance and only focused on revenue spending. 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. In presenting the report, it was noted that the Council had to spend in budget by the end of 2025/26, otherwise this will increase the amount of borrowing required under the Exceptional Financial Support arrangement.

It was shared with the Board that the Council overspent by £16 million in 2024/25 but only had £6 million in reserves available to fund the overspend. Therefore, the Council applied for Exceptional Financial Support in December 2024, of which £10 million will be utilised to fund the remaining 2024/25 overspend. The Council has not yet needed to undertake EFS borrowing, as this will depend on the Council's cashflow. Interest rates to borrow from the PWLB (Public Works Loan Board) are high at present at

6.2% over 20 years, therefore the Council will borrow later in the financial year when rates are expected to be more favourable. It was noted that the Council set the 2025/26 with an expectation of requiring a further £29 million of EFS borrowing.

The Board noted that changes to the home to school transport policy could not be implemented before the schools started the new term in September 2025.

In response, officers stated that due to the time taken to undertake the consultation process, the changes would now be implemented from January 2026 for new children and September 2026 for existing children.

Regarding home to school transport, officers agreed to see how many of these pupils had EHCPs (education, health and care plans).

It was noted that the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (Cipfa) will undertake a financial resilience review of the Council during the Autumn, on behalf of MHCLG. They will report their findings to Ministers, for final EFS approval to be granted during February 2026 to enable the Council to set a balanced budget for 2026/27.

Councillor Logan noted that the Children, Young People & Families PPB looked at the results of the consultation on school transport and made recommendations to the Executive Board.

RESOLVED: The Council's overall spending position as at 31 May 2025, as outlined in the report, be noted.

Meeting ended at 7:56 p.m.