REPORT TO:	Corporate and Inclusion Policy and Performance Board
DATE:	4 November 2025
REPORTING OFFICER:	Executive Director Environment and Regeneration
PORTFOLIO:	Corporate Services
SUBJECT:	Widnes Market
WARD(S)	Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on Widnes Market.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the report is noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The market business plan outlines the strategic priorities and actions to be implemented by the market management team to ensure Widnes Market continues to operate as a successful and sustainable trading environment.

3.2 The overarching vision is to position Widnes Market as a vibrant shopping destination at the heart of the town centre where customers can access a diverse range of quality products at competitive prices, and where traders are supported to thrive and grow their businesses.

3.3 The business plan identifies the following key themes as areas of focus for the market management team:

a) **Enhancing Digital Presence**: strengthen the market's online and social media visibility to increase engagement and reach.
b) **Diversifying the Offer**: actively attract new traders to broaden the range of unique and diverse products and services available.
c) **Community Engagement**: continue to host free public interest events to promote the market to both
d) **Economic Sustainability**: Ensure the market remains financially viable and resilient as a business model.

3.4 The above areas of focus have all been achieved as follows: -

3.5 a) A thorough review revealed that social media had been underused as a marketing tool. Market management acknowledged that the previous strategy did not fully leverage its potential. In response, a new approach was introduced, and early data shows promising improvements in reach and engagement. This has led to increased awareness of the market and its offerings.

3.6 A comparative dataset highlights the performance differences between the old and new strategies

Comparative Data – Facebook June 2025 – September 2025 v March 2025 – June 2025	
Area	**Performance**
Views	↑ 133%
Reach	↑ 130%
Content Interactions	↑ 168%
Link Clicks	↑ 118%
Page Visits	↑ 74%
Follows	↑ 182%
Performance Average	↑ **115%**

Comparative Data – Instagram June 2025 – September 2025 v March 2025 – June 2025	
Area	**Performance**
Views	↑ 209%
Reach	↑ 260%
Content Interactions	↑ 351%
Page Visits	↑ 59%
Follows	↑ 65%
Performance Average	↑ **158%**

3.7 While market management is committed to supporting traders with tools and guidance, individual businesses remain responsible for their own advertising and promotion. To enhance trader support, market management has partnered with organisations including the Business Improvement and Growth Team, Digital Cheshire, and Halton Chamber of Commerce. Though is still in early stages, the programme has begun planning training sessions. In the meantime, one-to-one and drop-in sessions with the new Business, Sales and Marketing Officer have been helping traders improve their social media and marketing skills.

3.8 Additionally, the market’s free wi-fi has been expanded to fully cover Widnes outdoor market. This upgrade enables easier internet access for traders and visitors, and supports outdoor traders using card payment devices, improving the customer experience

3.9 b) Widnes Market continues to offer a diverse and traditional retail experience, featuring long-standing stalls such as butchers, greengrocers, a fish counter, bakery, haberdashery, and fashion retailers. The market also includes homeware products like carpets, curtains, beds, and furniture.

3.10 A growing number of niche retailers add to the market’s unique character, offering items such as Spanish cleaning products and oriental foods. The market supports sustainability through repair-based services, including mobile phone, laptop, jewellery, vacuum cleaner, and clock/watch repairs.

3.11 Recent additions, such as traders selling stationery and baby shower gifts. further enhance the market’s variety and appeal to a broad customer base.

3.12 Widnes Market has revised its pop-up policy to attract new traders, especially local start-ups and young entrepreneurs. The updated format offers flexible, low-risk opportunities for testing products and business ideas in a real retail setting. This initiative promotes innovation, broadens the market’s offerings, and supports grassroots enterprise development across the borough.

3.13 c) Free events remain a vital tool for promoting Widnes Market to both consumers and prospective traders. A key focus has been engaging younger audiences through family-friendly activities. The headline event of 2025, ‘Marketfest’, was the largest and most successful to date, showcasing local artists and community groups, and extending into Widnes town centre with support from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

3.14 Widnes Market is celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2025, marking a major milestone in its longstanding role within the local community
and economy. The celebrations will culminate in December with a Victorian-themed Christmas event, blending festive cheer with historical homage. A new logo and the statement "our heritage is the foundation of our future" have been introduced to reflect both the market’s rich legacy and its forward-looking vision. As part of the commemorations, several long-standing traders, some active since 1945, will be formally recognised as heritage traders, celebrating their

enduring contribution and entrepreneurial spirit.

3.15 Additional events, such as back-to-school promotions, highlighted the market's wide range of relevant products. The annual student market trading day, run in partnership with Riverside College, provides students with real-world trading experience as part of their business studies curriculum, fostering entrepreneurship and strengthening educational ties.

3.16 Collaborations with community groups and small businesses help make Widnes Market a safe, inclusive, and culturally vibrant space. These partnerships boost footfall, visibility, and customer trust, supporting trader growth and sustainability

3.17 Market management has successfully co-ordinated a series of community engagement sessions throughout quarters one and two of the 2025/26 operating year. These sessions have provided a valuable platform to showcase the work of local organisations from across the borough. Over 50 sessions have been delivered during this period, featuring a wide variety of groups and activities, from awareness-raising stalls to interactive participation events.

3.18 Notable groups supported include Halton Sensory, the Methodist Prayer Group, Halton Health Watch, Neil Atherton (Bus Walker), Unlock Runcorn, and The Daniel Adamson. These initiatives have played a key role in promoting community cohesion, raising awareness of local causes, and celebrating the contributions of grassroots organisations.

3.19 Market management remains committed to facilitating inclusive and meaningful engagement opportunities that highlight the vibrancy and diversity of Halton's community sector.

3.20 d) Widnes Market continues to show strong economic viability, contributing valuable revenue to the Council and maintaining an 82% trader occupancy rate which is well above the national average of 72% (NABMA 2023). This is especially notable given the wider economic challenges facing local markets.

3.21 Market management has proactively supported traders affected by changes in business rates, successfully retaining five traders through collaboration with NABMA and a specialist consultant. Broader lobbying efforts for business rates reform are underway and expected to influence future government policy.

3.22 A range of incentives is in place to attract and retain traders, including rent discounts for new and expanding traders, low-cost expansion options for outdoor stalls, and a referral scheme. These measures, along with the recent addition of 14 new traders and several expansions, reflect a resilient and growth-focused market environment, despite the departure of 18 traders.

3.23 From April 2025, a key performance indicator (KPI) for budget recovery has been introduced as part of the quarterly monitoring reports. This new measure enables more transparent and consistent tracking of financial performance across the service. The results from the first two quarters have been particularly encouraging, with recovery rates of 121.96% and 147.78% respectively. These figures indicate that the market is currently delivering a positive financial return, exceeding budget expectations and contributing a surplus to overall service finances.

3.24 Additional areas currently being explored by the Market management team will be presented once the relevant policies and procedures have been developed and are ready for review.

3.25 a. Implementation of a Halton Market Rights Policy

3.26 Market rights are legal entitlements that allow an authority or organisation to operate a market. These rights can be derived from:

- Royal Charters or Letters Patent
- Prescriptive Rights (established through long-term use)
- Local Legislation
- Part III of the Food Act 1984 – a modern statutory framework often used by local authorities

3.27 Key Objectives:

- Protect existing market operators from competition that could undermine their viability.
- Clarify the legal basis under which a market operates.
- Ensure transparency and fairness in market operations and any new market proposals.

3.28 b. Implement a young entrepreneurs scheme as part of a broader initiative by the National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA) to engage and support young people in market trading and enterprise.

3.29 It's designed to revitalise markets by encouraging youth participation, fostering entrepreneurship, and creating vibrant community hubs.

3.30 Key Objectives:

- Encourage young people to explore market trading as a viable career or business path.
- Collaborate with schools, colleges, and training providers to offer enterprise experiences.
- Support youth-led market events and initiatives across the UK.
- Provide resources and best practice guidance for market operators working with young entrepreneurs.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 **Market Rights Policy Development**

The report details s future plans to implement a Halton Market Rights Policy (3.4) to clarify legal entitlements and protect existing operators.

This will require formal adoption and governance approval for implementation.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 As set out in 3.3 the market currently achieves in excess of full budget recovery.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

Health-focused community groups such as Halton Health Watch and Halton Sensory, which raise awareness of local health services and issues.

Access to fresh produce through traditional stalls (e.g., greengrocers, fish counters), contributing to healthier lifestyle choices.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

The Pop-up Policy supports local start-ups and young entrepreneurs, offering low-risk entry into retail.

Collaboration with Business Improvement and Growth Team, Digital Cheshire, and Halton Chamber of Commerce provides traders with access to training and support.

The Young Entrepreneurs Scheme aligns with NABMA's national initiative to foster youth enterprise and career pathways in market trading.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

Student Market Trading Day in partnership with Riverside College provides real-world enterprise experience for students, directly supporting youth development and employability.

Family-friendly events such as ‘Marketfest’ and seasonal promotions engage younger audiences and promote positive community interaction.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need
Encouraging businesses to make essential products and services more accessible and affordable, especially for low-income and marginalized communities.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future
None

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community
Inclusive and culturally vibrant spaces created through community partnerships.

Events and engagement activities that promote positive social interaction and community cohesion

7.0 Risk Analysis

7.1 There are no risks identified.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 None identified.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None identified.

10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

‘None under the meaning of the Act.’