

REPORT TO: Corporate and Inclusion Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 4 November 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director Environment and Regeneration

PORTFOLIO: Corporate Services

SUBJECT: Programmes Office Update

WARD(S) Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an annual update to Corporate PPB on the work of the Programmes Office in securing and managing external funding resources.

The Report covers the following areas:

- An update on the Programmes Office key activities and priorities
- Funding statistics for the period 2024-25

- 2.0 **RECOMMENDED: That the report be noted.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Role of the Programmes Office

- 3.2 The Programmes Office role is to help maximize external funding into the Borough and to undertake the monitoring for large-scale grant programmes to ensure compliance and eliminate clawback.

- 3.3 Formerly the External Funding Team, The Programmes Office was established in October 2022 and consists of the following posts:

- Programmes Office Manager
- Senior Funding Development Officer
- Funding Development Officer
- Senior Monitoring Officer
- Funding and Monitoring Officer
- Funding and Monitoring Officer 0.5
- Funding Support Assistant
- Promotions Officer 0.5 - currently delivered by an agency

- 3.4 The Team is responsible for preparing medium to large-scale funding bids (primarily over £50,000) on behalf of Council

colleagues, public sector partners, the voluntary sector and the private sector, with the aim of maximising external funding opportunities for Halton, focusing on key sources including: Government, National Lottery, Landfill Funding, Trusts and Foundations.

3.5 Current examples include UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), Town Deal Fund, Plan for Neighbourhoods.

3.6 Key functions of the Team include:

- Drafting or proofing of large-scale grant funding bids.
- Monitoring of strategic grant programmes, including the submission of claims, in order to ensure compliance and eliminate clawback.
- Maintaining a strategic approach to funding to ensure the most appropriate bids from Halton are submitted and internal competition is averted.
- The development of strategic project pipelines, for example, housing, regeneration, climate change and profile of these with key funders, Combined Authority, central Government etc.
- The operation and review of a Project Management System to ensure consistency of delivery and risk aversion on key schemes.
- Undertaking funding searches for specific projects; bid writing and development of supporting documents, e.g. policies and business plans etc.
- Dissemination of funding information to target audiences, mainly via the production of monthly Funding Bulletins on a range of themes.
- Lobbying funders, developing strong relationships with key funding bodies, and participating in key forums to ensure Halton gets its fair share of funding.
- Developing strong partnerships with Council colleagues, and the voluntary and private sectors where appropriate, to submit joint bids.
- Develop and deliver a training programme for HBC colleagues and partner organisations to enable capacity building.
- The delivery of secretariat support for a number of Boards which oversee funding schemes, e.g. Runcorn Town Neighbourhood Board.
- The delivery of a Communication Programme for key schemes, including Town Deal, UKSPF and Plan for Neighbourhoods.
- Leading on the delivery of Visitor Economy work for Halton, including the Visit Halton website, a Marketing Halton Board and the delivery of an annual campaign programme.

3.7 **Key Priorities 2024-25**

3.8 Emphasis over the period has been on:

- The introduction of a comprehensive Project Management System to support the delivery and management of large-scale regeneration projects.
- The introduction of a strategic pipeline function which will ensure Halton has a portfolio of projects ready to access funding sources and which are understood by key bodies, including the CA.
- Supporting the delivery of a range of Government-funded programmes, including Towns Fund, UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Plan for Neighbourhoods through a monitoring/compliance function and secretariat role.
- Delivering a Destination Marketing programme, which is part of an LCR-wide funded scheme, to promote Halton's visitor economy and cultural assets to both residents and visitors
- Supporting the development of the Halton's Culture26 programme – a year of cultural activity funded through LCR.

3.9 The Team continues to look at how we can further support HBC colleagues to bid for funding for priority schemes in order that we do not miss out on any appropriate funding streams.

3.10 **Key Projects and Team Stats**

3.11 **Key Projects**

3.12 This section outlines a number of key projects that the Programmes Office are delivering and/or monitoring:

- i) Project Management System implementation
- ii) UK Shared Prosperity Fund Programme – Year 4
- iii) Reconnecting Runcorn - Towns Fund Programme
- iv) Plan for Neighbourhoods Runcorn

i) Project Management System

ii) UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) – Year 4

3.13 UKSPF is a Government funding scheme allocated through the Combined Authority from April 2022-March 2026 and seen as a 'replacement' fund once the European Funding Programme ceased when the UK left the European Union.

3.14 Halton receives a 7.9% allocation of the Combined Authority pot, and the funding is split into capital and revenue. A breakdown of the Year 4 funding is detailed below:

- 3.15 Employment Support Programme - £347,805
 Business Support Programme - £121,423
 Communities and Place Programme - £297,439 comprising
 Widnes Town Centre, a Cultural programme and a Visitor
 Economy/Place programme.
- 3.16 Strands are led by relevant project leads across HBC and the
 Programmes Office is driving and monitoring spend and progress
 against outputs/outcomes.
- 3.17 This will be the last year of UKSPF funding, and we await details
 of the Integrated Settlement for the LCR which will determine
 funding streams from April 26.

iii) Town Deal – *Reconnecting Runcorn*

- 3.18 The *Reconnecting Runcorn* programme is a Government
 allocation of £23.6 million running to March 2026 for the
 redevelopment/connectivity of the Old Town area of Runcorn.
 Funding is drawn down based on a spending profile or forecast
 and monitoring reports are required to be submitted to
 Government in May and November.
- 3.19 The programme is split into 8 strands, and a useful map has
 been created to demonstrate the range of projects and the
 additional investment drawn in on the back of the Town Deal
 funding – see Appendix 2.
- 3.20 For further information and regular updates, please visit
 www.reconnectingruncorn.info
- 3.21 A more detailed report on the Town Deal programme is due to be
 presented to the Environment and Urban Renewal Policy and
 Performance Board's September meeting.

iv) Plan for Neighbourhoods Runcorn

- 3.22 An additional £20m has been allocated to Runcorn for the period
 2026-2036. The funding will be split out over the 10 years and
 includes both capital and revenue. Government requires a Vision,
 Regeneration Plan and Investment Plan by the end of November.
- 3.23 The Runcorn Town Neighbourhood Board (RTNB) is instrumental
 in the management of the funding; a subgroup of the board has
 been established to help develop the plans for Government and
 the portfolio of projects and this will be ratified by full Board prior
 to submission to MHCLG. Programmes Office is managing this
 process.
- 3.24 **Other work supported in 2024-25**

- An increase in our monthly average enquiries from 5 to 6
- Supported 59 organisations with funding searches
- Developed 30 bids for HBC or external groups of which 11 have been successful so far
- Supported 26 colleagues or community members with training on bid development, developing fundraising strategy, monitoring & evaluation
- Developed and distributed a monthly funding bulletin for the community
- Developing a National Lottery Heritage Fund bid for a project to celebrate the early life of Lewis Carroll who was born in the Borough at Daresbury

3.25 **Capacity and Demand**

3.26 Demand for the service remains steady; the Team received 39 requests for funding in 2024-25. This is lower than the previous year; however, the team is working more strategically on fewer bids but offering more in-depth support.

3.27 The Team works to full capacity which means decisions need to be made at times about where to allocate support, allowing the ability to respond to new enquiries and priorities, manage tight deadlines for bids, horizon scan to ensure opportunities are not missed etc.

3.28 Importantly, the Team does not drive projects, but specialises in sourcing funding, bid-writing and monitoring, acting as a critical friend or compliance checker.

3.29 Funding bids submitted in 2024-25 by the Programmes Office totalled £1.6m; this is lower than usual as the workload emphasis has been on supporting with funding streams where Halton has received as an allocation, e.g. UKSPF and Plan for Neighbourhoods, and on the monitoring of large-scale grants, e.g. Towns Fund.

3.30 See Appendix 3 for Programmes Office statistics.

3.31 **Community and Voluntary Sector**

3.32 The Programmes Office maintains a remit to support voluntary and community sector organisations to secure funding to support their services as well as help deliver Halton's strategic priorities.

3.33 Projects supported between April 24 and now include:

Catalyst Science Discovery Centre and Museum – External Repairs/ Restoration

Lewis Carroll Visitor Centre – Curious About Carroll – Culture 26 project
 St Michaels AFC – New Club House
 St Paul’s Church Transform – St Paul’s Tower Repair & Restoration
 Wat Phra Singh Temple – new Ubosot Hall
 Trinity Safe Space – New Venue and Service
 Norton Priory – Walled Garden/Courtyard Restoration
 Open 360 – monitoring of Lottery grant
 Runcorn ABC – New Venue and Service

- 3.34 Work has commenced on a Strategic Partnership Group that includes HBC Officers from Programmes Office, Community Development, Business Support and Supports Development, with senior officers from the Voluntary and Community Association (VCA). The purpose of the partnership is to ensure a more co-ordinated approach to supporting the voluntary sector and less duplication of effort.

3.35 **Liverpool City Region Cultural and Visitor Economy work**

- 3.36 The Team continues to undertake some key work with Liverpool City Region (LCR) and Halton partners in relation to Visitor Economy and Culture.

- The Programmes Office sits on the LCR Destination Management Board and is currently delivering the Destination Halton programme and fed into the development of an LCR Destination Management Plan (DMP).
- The team is overseeing the development of a Place Strategy which will bring together regeneration, inward investment and visitor economy/tourism/culture into a targeted strategy and marketing programme.
- The Team supports Cultivate: Halton’s cultural partnership with funding bids to deliver a quality arts and cultural programme for people in Halton and is supporting the programme of activity for Culture 26 through securing grant funding.
- The Programmes Office Manager sits on the LCR Culture Officers Group which delivers LCR-wide cultural events and helps drive the Boroughs of Culture programme.
- The Programmes Office Manager played a key role in the development of Halton’s Cultural Strategy published in 2023 and which is critical in securing funding via the Arts Council of England and National Lottery Heritage Fund.

3.37 **Training**

- 3.38 The Team has traditionally delivered a free training programme which is available to HBC colleagues and externally to the

voluntary and other public sector partners which consists of the following sessions:

- Top Tips for Bid-Writing
- Monitoring and Evaluating your Grant
- Now You've Got Your Grant
- Developing a Fundraising Strategy.

3.39 The training sessions are continually updated to improve bid-writing skill levels among both internal and external colleagues and also give a greater understanding of the context in which funding bids are submitted, helping to ensure that bids are prioritised and of the highest possible quality.

3.40 The Team has prioritised delivery to HBC colleagues and ran a number of sessions in April/May and these will be repeated in October/November; we also offer bespoke courses to individual teams or organisations.

3.41 **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

3.42 The Team's workload remains extremely busy; we continue to prioritise funding that has emerged through the Government's funding agenda, as well as funding opportunities via the Combined Authority, in order to support HBC's priorities and to ensure Halton bids for these funds where appropriate. At the same time, we will continue with our remit to support our voluntary sector colleagues to secure funding to deliver their vital services across the Borough.

3.43 The external funding environment remains vibrant, if not competitive, and we look forward to securing further investment into the Borough in the year ahead to support the corporate priorities and key strategic schemes going forward.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

None

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

None

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

All projects that request support from the Programmes Office must be supporting at least one of the Council's priorities.

6.1 **Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**

The Programmes Office supports projects that aim to improve the

health and wellbeing of residents.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

The Visitor Economy work that the Team undertakes aims to promote Halton's assets, helping to increase the spend by visitors in the Borough to support local venues and businesses.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

The Programmes Office supports projects that aim to provide help for children, young people and families.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

The Programmes Office supports projects that aim to help those most in need across the borough.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

The Team supports the Climate Change Action Plan work producing a funding matrix that will support the delivery of the activities in the Action Plan and also supports a number of projects that are aiming to improve the quality of green spaces and residents' experiences.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

The Destination Marketing work that the team leads on is working to promote Halton's assets to local residents, celebrating the heritage, art, culture and green spaces in the Borough

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

None

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

None

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

The Team supports the Climate Change Action Plan work producing a funding matrix that will support the delivery of the activities in the Action Plan

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

None under the meaning of the Act.