ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Policy and Performance Board on Wednesday, 10 September 2025 at the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Woolfall (Chair), P. Lloyd Jones (Vice-Chair), V. Hill, Hutchinson, K. Loftus, McDermott, Nelson, L. Nolan, C. Plumpton Walsh and Wainwright

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Stockton

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: K. Butler, L. Crampten, T. Gibbs, F. Harris, K. Horne, J. Parry and R. Taylor

Also in attendance: Councillors Thompson, Philbin, Jones and S. Hill in accordance with Standing Order Number 33.

ITEM DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

EUR12 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2025 having been circulated were signed as a correct record.

EUR13 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

It was confirmed that no public questions had been received.

EUR14 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES

The minutes relating to the Environment and Urban Renewal Portfolio, taken from the Executive Board meetings held since the last meeting of this Board, were attached at Appendix one for information.

It was noted that a report went to the Executive Board on 12 June 2025 regarding the cemetery infrastructure works and a range of environmental work at the three of the Council's cemeteries. However, Members reported that they had received negative feedback from members of the public, in particular to the long grass. These comments would be passed to relevant officers.

EUR15 PRESENTATION OF THE WIDNES TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION FRAMEWORK

The Board received a presentation which provided an overview of the Widnes Town Centre Regeneration Framework.

The presentation also outlined the objectives and spatial strategies to make the town centre more sustainable, cohesive and diverse. Consultation had taken place across the board, including Members, stakeholders, landowners and members of the public with a particular focus on youth engagement.

The Board was also provided with an update on progress so far.

Following Members discussion and questions, the following additional information was provided:

- Although in the very early stages, officers confirmed that they had spoken to the owners of Green Oaks to ask if they had any plans or aspirations for their site. They had also looked at how other towns had improved their market areas and the lessons that had been learned;

- Councillor Wainwright questioned if there was any intention of moving the market but he was not keen to make any plans on it becoming a food market. It was confirmed that further consultation would be carried out at a later stage where consideration would be given to the market;

- One of the concerns from the consultation was that the town centre was fragmented and needed to be more joined up, particularly to the Waterfront. Officers confirmed that this had been addressed in the framework, however, it was a very ambitious goal and it would require a lot of funding; and

- The Council had successfully won a bid from the INEOS Environment Fund for £50k which would be used to support environmental improvements in Widnes Town Centre. Although such improvements would be a short-term fix, it was hoped that the public would start to see some positive improvements quickly. This work was being led by Open Spaces and further information would be provided to Board Members via email.

It was agreed that:

- copies of the presentation slides would be circulated to the Board for information and if they had any further questions, officers would respond accordingly;
- a site visit for Board Members would be arranged in 12 months time; and
- a further progress report would be presented in June 2026.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the presentation and the Framework are noted.

Executive Director Environment & Regeneration

EUR16 AUTHORITY MONITORING REPORT – HOUSING & EMPLOYMENT 2024-25

The Board received the annual Authority Monitoring Reports (AMR) for Housing and Employment 2024-25. Local Planning Authorities were required to publish information on an annual basis that demonstrated progress with Local Plan preparation, reported any activity relating to the duty to co-operate, any information which related to indicators in the Plan and any policies which were not being implemented.

The Delivery and Allocations Local Plan (DALP) set out housing supply and location priorities for the Borough. The adopted Plan stated that there would be an additional 8,050 net homes provided between 2014 and 2037; an average rate of 350 dwellings per annum. The housing report showed that during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, 387 net houses had been completed, 87 of which were affordable housing. There was also 164 units currently under construction.

The DALP also stated that over the lifetime of the Local Plan (2014-2037), the Council would provide approximately 180 ha of land for employment purposes. During 2024/25 there had been 24.84 ha gross employment land completions, 22.12 ha (net) of employment land completed within a key urban regeneration area and 11% of completions were on Brownfield sites.

Members of the Board received copies of two infographic handouts which listed the key statistics from both the Housing and Employment Annual Monitoring Reports for 2024/25.

The following additional information was provided in response to Members questions/comments:

- Processing of planning applications was very market driven i.e. if people were buying, developers would build and when not, the market slowed down;
- Since the DALP was published, the figure for net homes had increased and the Council had granted over 1,000 applications in Widnes alone;
- Brownfield sites were difficult/expensive to build on and therefore not always attractive to developers; one third of the Borough was still Green Belt;
- There was no rationale of splitting new builds between Widnes and Runcorn; it was dependent on where developers wanted to build;
- Build on Brownfield sites went through peaks and troughs and was dependent on various factors including land being available; and
- It was noted that a lot of the new build sites in Halton largely consisted of 4-5 bedroom properties. However, affordable housing had to be included on all new sites and Halton's housing stock was predominantly Council Tax bands A and B. Whilst there was a commitment to address the housing crisis it was also important to encourage people to either stay living in the Borough or attract people to come and live here.

Following discussions, it was agreed that at the meeting in February 2026, the Board would receive a presentation detailing the Brownfield, Greenfield and Greyfield sites in the Borough.

RESOLVED: That the Board endorse the draft AMR's so that the documents can be made publicly available and published on the Council's website.

Executive Director Environment & Regeneration

EUR17 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORTS FOR QUARTER 1 OF 2025/26

The Board received the Performance Monitoring Report for Quarter 1 of 2025/26.

The key priorities for development of improvement in 2025/26 were agreed by Members and included in Directorate Plans for the various function areas reported to the Board as detailed below:

- Development and Investment Services;
- Highways and Transportation, Logistics and Development Services; and
- Waste and Environmental Improvement and Open Space Services.

The reports detailed progress against service objectives and milestones, and performance targets and provided information relating to key developments and emerging issues that had arisen during the period.

RESOLVED: That the quarter 1 performance management report be received and noted.

EUR18 COUNCILWIDE SPENDING AS AT 31 MAY 2025

The Board received a copy of a report, which was presented to the Council's Executive Board on 10 July 2025. The report outlined the Council's overall revenue and capital spending position as at 31 May 2025, together with the latest 2024/25 outturn forecast. The report also described the reasons for key variances from budget.

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.

It was noted that the net Council spending a at 31 May 2025 was £1.073m over budget. The outturn forecast for the year was estimated that net spending would be over budget by £6.185m if no corrective action was taken.

RESOLVED: That the Councilwide financial position as at 31 May 2025, as outlined in the report, be noted.

Meeting ended at 7.43 p.m.