

REPORT TO: Executive Board
DATE: 19th March 2009
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Corporate and Policy
SUBJECT: Local Area Agreement for Halton - 2009 Refresh
WARDS: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

A Local Area Agreement is a 3-year protocol that sets out the priorities for a local area. This must be agreed between central government and the area itself, as represented by the lead local authority and other key partners through Local Strategic Partnership. Halton has had in place an Agreement since June 2008 covering the period 2008-2011. There is an annual review and refresh of the agreement. The purpose of this report is to consider revisions to the Halton Local Area Agreement.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That the revised Local Area Agreement be adopted.**
- (2) That the Chief Executive be given delegated authority in consultation with the Leader and relevant Portfolio-holder to make final amendments to the Local Area Agreement during the course of negotiation and approval by the government.**

3.0 BACKGROUND

The 2008-11 Local Area Agreement (LAA) is undergoing its first annual refresh. The focus of this refresh is to

- agree targets for those indicators for which no baseline information was available last May. This includes all those indicators measured by surveys conducted in the autumn of 2008.
- review a number of targets for which local baseline information was used and which now need to be updated in the light of new national data sets.
- Local partners have also taken the opportunity to review a number of indicators for which targets set nationally for Halton are clearly unachievable.

Government has acknowledged that the ability to meet employment related targets will be affected by the recession. It has been agreed that these will be reviewed next year.

The timetable for the finalisation of the agreement with government is:

2 March 2009: submit draft LAA to GONW

9 March 2009: GONW submits draft to central government

9-26 March 2009: cross-government consideration of refreshed LAAs. Negotiations completed on any outstanding issues.

27 March:- 1 April 2009 GONW submits final LAAs to Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Early April: Secretary of State approval of revised LAAs

Council has delegated to this Board the approval of the Local Area Agreement. Given the above timetable, and that there is not another Board meeting until April 2nd 2009, it is recommended that delegated powers be granted for any further amendments to be made as a result of feedback from government.

A copy of the revised outcomes framework is appended. Those targets which have changed since the LAA was originally approved in 2008 are shaded. At the time of writing negotiations over some targets are continuing. Any further changes will be reported to the meeting of the Board. Two indicators have been deleted from the LAA. The first, NI 124 relates to patients with a long term condition who are supported to live independently. The data for this indicator comes from a patient survey. It is not possible to disaggregate Halton's figures from St Helens, and the survey is not due until 2010, so it is of no benefit to include it in the LAA, and performance in St Helens would affect Halton's reward grant (see below). It has therefore been removed from the agreement but will remain a local priority. The second indicator removed is NI 173, people falling out of work and onto incapacity benefits. The change to the Benefit system relating to incapacity mean that there is no baseline information against which to set targets, and it is not yet clear how it will be measured. As with NI 124, this remains a priority for Halton, but there is no practical means for setting a nd agreeing a target at this stage.

It is important to read the 3 year LAA in the context of the longer term priorities and objectives of the Sustainable Community Strategy . The Sustainable Community Strategy has a longer term vision and also contains other local indicators and targets in addition to those negotiated with government through the LAA.

4.0 LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT REWARD GRANT

At the end of the Local Area Agreement period, reward grant will be available to Halton. The amount of reward will depend upon progress towards targets, averaged across all indicators in the Agreement. Thus if all targets are met, 100% of the available reward grant will be paid. If on average we have only moved three quarters of the way from current performance to our target, we will only receive 75% of the grant. The maximum available grant is expected to be £891,546. This is

significantly less than the reward grant previously available under the LPSA process which it replaces. There will be additional WNF reward grant weighted towards progress against specified economic indicators.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT

Progress against the LAA targets will form a key part of the CAA assessment. Red flags may be allocated where the Audit Commission considers it unlikely that targets will be met. It is therefore important that the targets in the LAA are ambitious for our community, but realistically achievable. The CAA is an assessment of progress in Halton as a whole, and as such has implications not only for the Council, but also for other partners.

6.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The LAA is based around the priorities and objectives in the Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Plan.

7.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The delivery of the LAA will require the application of resources by all the partners in Halton, and consideration of impact on priorities is already part of the Council's budget setting process.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

The LAA sets out targets for Children and Young People, Employment Learning and Skills, Healthy Halton, Safer Halton and Urban Renewal in Halton.

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

The key risks to the revision of the LAA are failure to reach agreement with Government, or acquiescence to unrealistic targets.

The risks to delivery of the LAA are the same as the risks to the delivery of our key objectives which are set out in the Corporate Risk Register and Partnership Risk Register.

10.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

The Local Area Agreement is based on the same values that underpin the Community Strategy and Corporate Plan. These make explicit a commitment to equality and diversity. The Agreement reinforces this value-driven system of corporate and partnership working.

10.0 REASON (S) FOR DECISION

Under the Local Government Act (2007) there is a statutory duty on all local authorities to produce a Local Area Agreement to the format and timetable set down by Government.

11.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

No other options were pursued. The Agreement process is a prescriptive one and Halton has followed Government guidance.

12.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

The Local Area Agreement will come into force when the Agreement in its final form is agreed and signed by the Minister for Local Government. This is expected to take place in April 2009.

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

Halton Local Area Agreement – 2008-11 is available from:
Rob MacKenzie *2nd floor Municipal Building*
Contact number 0151 471 7416.