

Environment Directorate
Quarter 4 (2008 – 09) Overview Report

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report provides an overview of issues and progress within the directorate for the period year-ending 31st March 2009.

2.0 Key Developments

2.1 The principal key developments that have emerged during the course of the period, a number of which are related to initiatives to enhance the cohesiveness and quality of local service provision and to mitigate against the impacts of the national economic downturn, include:-

- I. The early implementation of the Apprenticeship Project which has led to 20 placements within local businesses, 15 of which were taken by individuals previously not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- II. The establishment of a Partners Recession Group, to provide a focal point in addressing challenges faced by local businesses and a multi-agency Halton Employment Team to develop and deliver training packages and bespoke employability programmes.
- III. A significant reduction in crime within Astmoor and Halebank industrial estates which has reduced by 65% and 32% respectively.
- IV. The reclamation of 120 hectares of land on the 3MG site and further development of 800, 000 sq ft of warehouse space by Stobbart Ltd.
- V. The development of a Liverpool City Region Multi Area Agreement (MAA) to provide a framework for regional co-operation to improve economic opportunities.
- VI. The approval of the Mersey Gateway Sustainable Transport Strategy which comprises of nine improvement themes which are to be taken forward in two stages during the periods to and beyond 2025.
- VII. The completion of the Accessible Transport Study that will be reported to the Urban renewal Policy and Performance Board in June 2009.
- VIII. The Waste Management and Recycling contract is currently at the final stages of evaluation and a preferred bidder was announced during April.

- IX. During the final quarter of the year 3,000 households were added to the green waste collection service and the blue wheeled bin recycling scheme. This brings total numbers of properties to 37, 800 and 42, 000 respectively.
- X. Additionally during the last quarter of the year 17 fixed penalty notices were issues for litter offences and 6 were issued for dog fouling offences. Of these 13 were paid, 5 offenders elected to go to court and 5 are still currently in process.

3.0 Emerging Issues

3.1 Those primary emerging issues that have been identified during the period and that will impact upon the work of the Directorate are:-

- I. the inspection by OFSTED of the LSP /DWP funded programmes within Economic Regeneration that will be undertaken during spring 2009.
- II. Continuing the progression of Halton's next Economic Development Strategy following the Economic Review of 2008.
- III. The commencement of the Mersey Gateway Public Enquiry on 19th May 2009 and the establishment of an independently managed Public Enquiry website. Recommendations are expected to be made by the Inspector to central government, before Christmas 2009, with a final decision expected early in 2010.
- IV. Guidance from the Food Standards Agency in March 2009 will result in approximately 120 premises being added to the intervention programme for 2009 – 10. This results from the new inclusion of child minders serving food as part of their service.
- V. A review of Haltons Waste Management Strategy will be undertaken during 2009 – 10
- VI. Following a successful England Schoolboys trial match during autumn last year discussion are now underway to host a full England Schoolboy international at the Stobbart Stadium during early 2010. If successful this will have a positive impact of raising the profile of the borough and further enhancing the reputation of the stadium as a premier venue for major sporting events.
- VII. There have been significant above inflation increases in food costs over the recent period and this will create some tension between the way in which meals can reasonably be costed without adversely affecting the demand for nutritional meals particularly for those who fall above the free meal threshold but are on comparatively low incomes.

4.0 Service Objectives / Milestones

4.1 The significant majority of service objectives within the directorate have been delivered as planned and most notably positive progress has been made in regards to:-

- I. The delivery of targeted outreach campaigns in priority wards across the borough to increase local employability and identify and reduce the barriers in the path to employment and the delivery of the Widnes Industrial Action Plan to improve the business environment.
- II. Continued improvement to parks, sports grounds and nature reserves and the securing of further National Lottery Funding for restoration works to Runcorn Hill Park.
- III. The expansion and extension of waste recycling wheeled bin schemes across the borough.
- IV. The delivery of the Local Transport Plan Capital Programme, the submission of the mid-term Review to the Dept for Transport and the delivery of the Vehicle Fleet Replacement Programme, all achieved within planned timescales.
- V. The ongoing delivery of the Castlefields regeneration programme, the revision of phase 2 implementation to include a new health centre and confirmation of funding for a further phase of the RSL programme.
- VI. The development and delivery of Action Plans across all schools to allow shared learning and to raise awareness and promote healthy eating and meal take up.

4.2 Of those service objectives that have been assigned red traffic lights a number result from the outcome being achieved by alternative means or whereby external forces have had a negative affect upon the achievement of key milestone dates. Those objectives / key milestones that have not progressed as originally planned include:-

- I. The adoption of the Southern Widnes Regeneration Area SPD, originally planned for March 2009, has been delayed as a result of the need to consider options and traffic routes in relation to the Mersey Gateway Project. Implementation is now scheduled for autumn 2009.
- II. The commencement of the Waste Management & Recycling Contract has been slightly delayed although this process should be complete by 01st June 2009.
- III. The School pathfinder Scheme, intended to widen the range of home to education / training transport, has not been implemented as a result of the DCSF deciding not to provide funding to any local authorities. Further guidance from DCSF is now awaited.

- IV. The completion of public art work within the Widnes Waterfront District which has been delayed due to land contamination issues. The project will now be taken forward into 2009-10.

5.0 Performance Indicators / Targets

- 5.1 The majority of performance indicators within the Directorate that can be reported have achieved or exceed their annual target.

Most notably positive progress has been shown in relation to:-

- I. 800 local people have been assisted into employment during the year, an increase of almost 100% on that achieved during 2007-08.
 - II. High levels of resident satisfaction have been achieved for parks and open spaces [97%] and the standard of cleanliness and maintenance of parks and green spaces [94%].
 - III. Excellent performance has been achieved in relation to principal and classified road condition and nationally Halton is amongst the highest performing authorities.
- 5.2 There are a small number of indicators that have failed to achieve targeted levels, in some cases very marginally, and these include:-
- I. The number of inward investment enquires which has also fallen from 2007 / 08 levels. Given the current economic climate this decline is not unexpected as is likely to continue into the current financial year with the commercial property industry being particularly exposed.
 - II. Although there has been an expansion of services recycling, composting and landfill targets have not been met. Further initiatives are planned for the coming financial year which should have a positive impact in this area.

6.0 Financial Summary

- 6.1 Given that there are a considerable number of year-end transactions still to take place a Financial Statement for the period has not been included within this report in order to avoid providing information that would be subject to further change and amendment. The final 2008/09 financial statements for the Department will be prepared and made available via the Council's Intranet once the Council's year-end accounts have been finalised. A notice will be provided within the Members' Weekly Bulletin as soon as they are available