

URBAN RENEWAL POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board held on Wednesday, 17 June 2009 at Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Hignett (Chairman), Balmer, P. Blackmore, E. Cargill, Hodgkinson, Murray, Nolan, Rowe and Thompson

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Morley and Leadbetter

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: G. Collins, D. Cunliffe, M. Noone, R. Mackenzie, P. McWade, T. Upton, M. Simpson, A. Villiers and S. Williams

Also in attendance: Inspector Tony Hayes - Cheshire Police, Cllr Polhill in accordance with Standing Order 33 and Cllr S.Blackmore.

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

At the beginning of the meeting the Board noted their best wishes to Cllr Morley during his recovery and wished him well.

URB1 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18th March 2009 having been printed and circulated were agreed and signed as a correct record.

URB2 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

It was confirmed that no public questions had been received.

URB3 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES

The Board considered the Minutes of the meetings of the Executive Board and Executive Board Sub Committee relevant to the Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board.

In receiving the minutes the Board discussed the de-linking proposals and the sustainable transport strategy for the Mersey Gateway.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes be received.

URB4 SSP MINUTES

The Board received the Minutes of the Specialist Strategic Partnership held on 18th November 2008.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes be noted.

(Councillor Rowe declared a personal interest in the following item due to being a private landlord in receipt of deposit scheme funds)

(NB Councillor Hignett declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the following two items due to being employed by CIC and left the room during its consideration)

(Councillor Nolan in the Chair)

URB5 HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY CONSULTATION EXERCISE

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director, Health and Community which provided the draft Homeless Strategy for the Borough in addition to the findings of the consultation exercise taken with stakeholders and service users.

Members were advised that the Homelessness Act 2002 required each local authority to review the extent and nature of homelessness in their area and to produce a strategy and action plan to prevent and tackle the problem. Halton's first strategy was first published in 2003 creating a 5 year programme of measures to develop and improve services for households who become homeless and to prevent homelessness.

Appended to the report were the Executive Summary – Strategic Review and Recommendations and the draft Homeless strategy for consideration. Members were informed of the consultation process and that the responses received were mainly positive.

It was reported that the next stage was to revise the draft document collating feedback received. It was reported that the existing three documents would be merged and simplified into two documents being The Homelessness Review and the Homelessness Strategy which would include an executive summary of the review.

The Board queried whether the consultation had taken into account the economic climate. In response, it was noted that the Council was in the process of producing recession action plans and key stakeholders would be involved in the planning process.

The Board discussed the choice based lettings (CBL) system in relation to whether the system was effective. It was advised that CBL schemes were currently being explored with the opportunity to introduce banding.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the results of the consultation be noted; and
- 2) a final document be prepared for adoption by a future Executive Board which incorporates comments from the Urban Renewal PPB and the consultation exercise.

Strategic Director
- Health and
Community

URB6 MID TERM REVIEW OF SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Corporate and Policy which provided an amended version of the Sustainable Community Strategy document for comment.

It was advised that Local Authorities were required to prepare and implement a Sustainable Community Strategy. It was noted that the Council was expected to work with partners through the Local Strategic Partnership to agree priorities and to engage and involve local communities. It was reported that the current Sustainable Community Strategy was adopted in 2006 and contained the long-term vision and objectives with delivery targets for the period 2006-2011.

Members were advised that since it was prepared, a number of changes had taken place which made it necessary to conduct a mid-term review of the Sustainable

Community Strategy. The Board was informed that this was an update and not a complete revision.

The Board was advised that recent perception surveys and the revised State of the Borough Report (2009) confirmed that the underlying vision and priorities from 2006 remained relevant. Widespread engagement had not, therefore been undertaken for this mid-term review. However, in 2010/11 work would commence on a full review and roll forward of the strategy with wide engagement and would link up with work being done on the Local Development Framework Core Strategy.

The main objectives of this mid term review were outlined in the report for Members' consideration. The draft of the mid term review had been drawn up following consultation with partners and was considered by the Halton Strategic Partnership Board on 20th May 2009. It was reported that the revised Sustainable Community Strategy had to be adopted by full Council as per the Local Government Act 2000. Following consultation with the Policy and Performance Board it was planned to take the final draft to the Full Council meeting on 22nd July with a recommendation from Executive Board for final adoption. The draft mid term review document was included in the report for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED: That the draft mid term review of the Sustainable Community Strategy be received.

(NB Councillor Hignett in the Chair)

URB7 QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORTS

The Board received a report of the Chief Executive which detailed the 4th quarter performance management reports on progress against service plan objectives and performance targets, performance trends/comparisons and factors affecting the services for –

- Highways, Transportation and Logistics;
- Environment and Regulatory Services;
- Health and Partnerships;
- Culture and Leisure;
- Economic Regeneration; and
- Major Projects

In receiving the 4th quarterly monitoring reports the following points were noted:

- In relation to HT6 it was noted that due to the economic climate it had been difficult obtaining fleet vehicles;
- In relation to NI 177 it was reported that for Quarter 4 the figure should have read 6230,177 rather than 5,599,000

RESOLVED: That the 4th quarter performance management reports be received.

URB8 ANNUAL REPORT

The Board considered a copy of the Annual Report for the Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board 2008/09. The full Board met five times during the year and the main initiatives that the Board had worked on during the year were as follows:

- Workforce and Skills for the Logistics Industry;
- The Future of Town Centres Management (continuation of);
- Implications of de-linking the Silver Jubilee Bridge; and
- Housing Strategy (continuation of) .

The Board was advised that should they have any further comments to add to the Annual Report Members were to inform the lead officer.

The Chairman thanked all the Councillors and Officers for their support during the year.

RESOLVED: That the Annual Report be received for the purpose of its adoption at a forthcoming meeting of Full Council.

URB9 LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT REFRESH & 2008/09 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Corporate and Policy which outlined the progress made towards meeting Local Area Agreement targets at the end of the first year of the Agreement.

The Board was advised that the revised Local Area Agreement (LAA) was signed off by the Secretary of State in June 2008. The purpose of the LAA was to agree a set of targets for Halton with Government and local partners. It

was noted that named partners had a duty to co-operate in striving to achieve those targets. There were 32 indicators in the LAA, together with statutory education and early years targets. The Agreement covered the period April 2008 to March 2011.

The Board was advised that the Agreement was refreshed in March 2009. The indicators and targets were reviewed with Government Office and there were a number of gaps and estimates in the original Agreement, therefore the principal changes were to fill these gaps using information that had become available between June 2008 and March 2009 such as the results of the Places Survey. A summary of the changes were attached as an appendix to the report for Members' consideration.

Members were further advised that the economic downturn would inevitably have an impact on the likelihood of achieving some targets relating to the economy and housebuilding, and the government had identified a list of indicators for which targets would be reviewed before the end of March 2010, by which time the impact of the downturn would be clearer.

Outlined in the report for consideration was progress over the first year of the agreement which covered the indicators that fell within the responsibilities of the Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board. It was noted that this was based on the targets in the refreshed agreement and Members were advised that in reading the report it should be noted that all the national indicators were built into the quarterly service plan monitoring reports and certain indicators were only reported some time after year end. Therefore, in those cases no progress report was yet available. There were also some survey based indicators for which no further data would be available until the survey was repeated in 2010.

The Board was advised that LAA reflected the priorities in our community strategy for improving the quality of life in Halton. It was the main mechanism by which government would performance manage local areas and it was therefore important that the Council monitored progress and that Members were satisfied that adequate plans were in place to ensure that the improvement targets were achieved.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

URB10 FOOTWAY CONDITION & STRUCTURAL MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director, Environment which provided information on the condition of the footways in Halton in response to a recent press release from the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists (CSP), which highlighted the condition of the footways, nationally, to publicise problems that broken pavements posed to older and infirm people.

The Board was advised the press release from SCP alleged that Halton's pavements were the worst in the North West and that 50% of our pavements were in need of repair. Their press release used data from Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 187. It was advised that this indicator which measured the condition of walking routes, had its limitations in that it reported on only a small percentage of the footway network, where structural maintenance should be considered.

It was noted that the indicator did not generally include footways in residential areas or along unclassified roads. Although the indicator had been dropped from the new National Indicator set, it was acknowledged that the conditions of footways was a very valuable indicator, not only in terms of accessibility and safety, but also in the contribution that well-maintained footways made to the appearance of local neighbourhoods and also of the level of public satisfaction within the Borough's highways service provision.

Members were further advised that the proposals to develop a new local indicator that would measure the condition of all footways which could be used as the basis for future service monitoring.

The report also outlined factors affecting the BVPI surveys, Footway Safety Inspections and Repairs, Footway Survey and Reconstruction Programme, Local Performance Indicators and Footway Reconstruction Budget.

The Board discussed the condition of various footpaths in the Borough which were not owned by the Council. In response, Members were requested to notify the Highways Section of which footpaths were in poor condition and these could be examined.

Members suggested that the highway adoption register be added to Plan Web in order for Members to

clarify which footpaths needed attention.

The Board queried whether the highway adoption records could be available on line as a layer to Plan Web. In response it was noted that this would be investigated with ICT Services.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the decision of Executive Board on 19th March 2009, to prioritise footway reconstruction within the Highways Capital Maintenance block budget allocation, doubling the area of footways to be reconstructed for the next two years, be endorsed; and
- 2) the suggestion of adding the highway adoption as a layer to Plan Web be explored.

URB11 HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT SCHEME A5080 LUNTS HEATH ROAD/B5419 WILMERE LANE JUNCTION

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director, Environment, which outlined the progress made in the development of a proposed highway improvement scheme at the junction of Lunts Heath Road and Wilmere Lane junction, Widnes, as requested by the Farnworth Ward Councillors.

It was advised that the origins of the need to consider a highway improvement scheme dated back to 2005 when Birchwood, Farnworth and Halton View Area Forum requested investigation of a scheme to close the existing left-turn slip road from Lunts Heath Road to Wilmere Lane. A number of layout options were considered by the Area Forum, however, due to various site and safety constraints, it had not been possible to propose a solution that could be implemented from the Area Forum's limited budget allocation.

It was further advised that at the Forum's January 2008 meeting, concerns were raised about increased traffic flows which resulted in congestion and unsafe traffic manoeuvres at the junction. During this meeting the Highways Division was asked to investigate these problems. The Board was advised that it was recognised that the cost of a scheme to resolve capacity and safety issues at the junction would be beyond the scope of the Area Forum budget and that if a scheme were to proceed funding would be required from other capital budgets. At the end of

October 2008 Area Forum Members requested that a report be prepared for the Urban Renewal PPB to consider a highway improvement scheme to address the problems at the junction.

The progress made to date was outlined in the report for Members' consideration in addition to the various issues surrounding such a scheme.

The Board was advised that, due to the current programme of schemes, there were no proposals to carry out any further work at this present time. However, options for funding for the design and an implementation of a scheme were currently being explored. It was further advised that additional preliminary design work and traffic re-modelling was required.

Members stressed that safety to vehicles and efficiency were the main aspects in considering proposed highway improvement schemes and suggested that ongoing dialogue take place between Members and the Highways and Transportation Department. It was also suggested that within the next year's Capital Programme for LTP, funding be allocated into this in order to facilitate proposed highways improvement schemes at the junction.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the progress made in the development of a scheme to improve the junction of Lunts Heath Road and Wilmere Lane be noted;
- (2) options for funding for design and implementation of a scheme are further explored; and
- (3) consideration be given to include funding for junction improvements be included in the Capital Programme for Local Transport Plan for the 2010/11.

URB12 NOMINATION OF MEMBERS TO THE HALTON PUBLIC TRANSPORT ADVISORY PANEL

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Environment which requested Members agree nominations of Members to sit on the Public Transport Advisory Panel for the 2009/10 Municipal Year.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the nomination for Halton Public Transport Advisory Panel for 2008/09 be as follows:

Councillor Hignett (Chair)
Councillor Morley (Vice Chair)
Councillor Polhill
Councillor Hodgkinson

- 2) the key issues discussed by the Panel during the Municipal Year 2008/9 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report be noted.

URB13 RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Environment which sought the views of the Board on Halton Borough Council's first draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan, to enable any comments to be incorporated into the document prior to the Plan being presented to the Executive Board for approval.

It was reported that Section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 introduced a requirement that all highway authorities in England and Wales prepared a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP).

Members were advised that Rights of Way Improvement Plans were not about rights of way in isolation, they were intended to deliver an integrated network of routes in and between town and country. The Rights of Way Improvement Plan must assess:

- The extent to which the local rights of way network met the present and likely future needs of the public;
- The opportunities provided by local rights of way for exercise and other forms of outdoor recreation and enjoyment of the Authority's area; and
- The accessibility of local rights of way to blind and partially sighted people and others with mobility problems.

It was further noted that the Plan must also contain "Statement of Actions" that the highway authority intended to carry out in order to improve its network, with particular regard to issues identified within the assessment. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) had issued guidance to local authorities on how it should approach the preparation of its Plan, which had been

followed in the preparation of this Plan.

A copy of Halton's draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan Summary document was outlined in Appendix 1 for consideration. This draft was currently out to consultation with a wide range of users and stakeholders to enable their views to be taken into consideration prior to the Plan being put to the Executive Board in July 2009.

The Board was requested to forward any comments to the Operational Director – Highways, Transportation and Logistics prior to the Executive Sub Board scheduled for July.

RESOLVED: That the Board forward the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan to the Executive Board for consideration.

URB14 WINTER MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Environment which reviewed the measures put in place to deliver the duty to treat highways for snow and ice and, in particular, the delivery of the service in the 2008/2009 gritting season.

The Board was advised that Halton undertake a Winter service that made use of the latest technology and development and was effective in treating the network for snow and ice. The operational aspects of the service were set out in Halton's Winter Maintenance Plan and fully met legislative demands and also the requirements and obligations of the Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management.

It was reported that as part of a programme of improvement to service delivery a number of developments and innovations had been introduced since Local Government re-organisation passed the responsibility for the operation to Halton. These included improvements to Winter Service fleet, route optimisation and GPS control which had formed part of a gradual development that had been undertaken within the existing budget resource. Details of the Winter Service delivery were appended to the report for Members' consideration.

It was noted that the plans were reviewed annually and were revised to take into account networks. These plans had been evolved and developed over many years and main

gritting routes that were scheduled were predominantly centred upon Runcorn Expressways, Runcorn area, Widnes area and the Busway and Widnes Eastern Bypass.

Members were further advised that plans had been successful in keeping all the main vehicular routes through the Borough open at all times. Detailed in the report was a graph which illustrated the number of grits undertaken this season compared with previous years which detailed a significant increase. In response to weather conditions from October 2008, gritting was carried out on Halton's highway network on 65 occasions spreading over 2,000 tonnes of salt which was more than double than that expected during the Winter season.

The Board was also informed of the national salt stock shortages during the most severe part of the gritting season in 2008/9 and it was noted that Halton was fortunate in that stocks were kept to optimum levels and Halton was able to provide assistance to several neighbouring authorities on several occasions.

It was further reported that resulting from the sharp increase in ice-related slipping injuries, the PCT had contributed £25,000 per annum over the next 5 years to extend gritting operations, targeted at pedestrian routes around schools and shopping areas. The Board raised concerns in relation to grit being made available immediately outside schools.

RESOLVED: That

(1) the report be received; and

(2) the option of providing grit along immediate school routes be explored

URB15 REVIEW OF WARRINGTON ROAD TRANSIT SITE

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director, Health and Community which reviewed the income against costs of the Warrington Road Transit Site.

It was reported that in order to consider the effectiveness of the facility and its financial impact in the widest sense, the information be brought to the PPB for scrutiny.

The report detailed the following:

- weekly occupancy levels since the site opened in February 2009, which overall had averaged 56% of capacity, however this figure was rising due to increased occupancy in recent weeks;
- the draft budget used for estimating purposes when determining the necessary pitch charge. It was noted that the second column was an attempt to forecast the full year budget based on known costs, estimates and income to date. However, the figures must still be considered with some caution due to bills not having been received yet for utility costs. Therefore, true operating costs would not be known until the facility had operated for a year or more.

Furthermore the Board was advised that estimated pitch fee income had been revised downwards on the basis that 90% occupancy was unlikely to be achieved in the first year. This was due to reduced traveller migration and word not spreading to the traveller community of the site's existence. The estimated occupancy rate was now 60%. This revised budget estimate increased the forecast annual deficit from £619 to £9,479. It was reported that in establishing the true financial impact of the facility on Council budgets, regard should also be taken of the previous cost to the Council of managing unlawful encampments.

Detailed in the report were the combined results from the relevant sections in each directorate which incurred a cost in dealing with unlawful encampments during 2005/6 and 2006/7. This figure totalled £128,856 per year and excluded the substantial Police costs involved.

Inspector Tony Hayes addressed the Committee and reported that since the transit site had been established, there had only been two illegal encampments one of which moved to the transit site and the second group were moved from the Borough when they declined to move to the transit site following a Police direction under Section 62 of the CJPOA Act 1994. It was reported that whilst the transit site was unlikely to achieve a balanced budget this year due to early losses when the site first opened there was, nevertheless, significant saving in costs when compared to expenditure incurred in previous years in relation to illegal encampments.

The Board considered four options for reducing the funding deficit as follows:

1. to raise the pitch charge to a level that covers the shortfall;
2. that a proportion of the site be given over to permanent occupation;
3. to actively publicise the site amongst the wider Traveller community to ensure the site is as full as possible at all times; and
4. to retain current charge levels and further review costs after a full financial year of operation

Having considered all the information and options the Board;

RESOLVED: That

having reviewed performance of the Gypsy and Travellers' Transit Site operating in Runcorn it was found that since opening, the Site had not been cost efficient in terms of its operating costs (rental revenue vs expenditure) with evidence that operational financial losses have occurred on almost every week the Site has been in operation. The Urban Renewal PPB therefore made the following **recommendations** to Executive Board Sub.

(1) the site should be operated on a stand-alone financial basis namely ensuring that the site annual rental income covers the site's annual operating expenditure with all opportunities to maximise income being adopted namely; the rental criteria should be levied (with the exception of the Site Manager) against all caravans, mobile homes that occupy the site and not merely some caravans and mobile homes. All other forms of determining who should or should not be charged for a pitch should cease;

(2) caravan pitch charges should be reviewed and increased to ensure that the objective of item 1 above could be realised. In determining income levels, charges should be set to reflect the need to keep several pitches vacant at any one time in order to not eliminate the legal opportunities the transit site offered the Police to move on illegal encampments;

(3) the site should not be subsidised financially by residents of the Borough either directly or indirectly;

(4) the practice of using cost savings made by reducing the amount of instances HBC would have dealt with unauthorised encampments had the transit site not

been in operation to offset the financial operational losses the site made should cease;

(5) the PPB did not accept that raising rental charges on the site would potentially lead to unauthorised encampments. This is based upon legal opinion that Gypsies and Travellers who claimed limited financial means may in fact be able to claim benefits to offset the fee paid for the pitch and there should be a “contingency plan” to accommodate increased demand at certain times by Gypsies and Travellers wishing to use the site and thereby minimising the risk that the Police would be unable to use their extended powers to move illegally camped Gypsies and Travellers.

The Urban Renewal PPB also made the following **observations**.

The PPB is of the view that supporting information provided to them to review at this meeting was, in part, accurate and that a better management of information and data by Officers in relation to this Site was required in the future to enable Councillors to arrive at a balanced conclusion.

It was noted that, in the past, comment had been expressed by some Councillors at full Council that Officers had been repeatedly asked for information on this Site with the perception being that such requests were in some ways unreasonable. This PPB wishes to point out that the role of Councillors was to scrutinise and the request for information from Officers to enable Councillors to do this was clearly a reasonable one irrespective of the number of times requests need to be made.

URB16 TOPIC ISSUES WORK PROGRAMME

The meeting of the Board on the 21st January 2009 agreed the topic issues that it wished to pursue in 2009/10. It was reported that the topics to be considered in 2009/10 would be a joint group with Employment and Skills on Workforce and Skills for the Science industry, focusing on Daresbury.

Additionally all members were invited to attend the Local Development Framework Working Party (continuation).

Members were requested to notify the Chairman of

which Topic Group they would like to be part of.

RESOLVED: That Members of the Policy and Performance Board agree details of the Topic Briefs which had been considered by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Board.

URB17 TOPIC GROUP - WORKFORCE AND SKILLS FOR THE LOGISTICS INDUSTRY - SUMMARY REPORT

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Environment which provided an update of the ideas put forward in June 2008 to identify the future skill needs within the Logistics Sector in Halton and to assess whether existing activity would meet those needs including the identification of opportunities for improved performance. In addition to exploring in-work training opportunities within logistics companies in the Borough.

It was advised that the proposed recommendations would lead to an improvement in the employment opportunities within logistics, particularly in terms of Halton's long-term unemployed adults residents.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) ***That approval is given to Council Officers to conclude the work of this Topic Group;***
- 2) That the recruitment model for the 3MG development is tested, including feeding back on:
 - i. Number of applicants
 - ii. Number of interviews
 - iii. Number of successful job outcomes for Halton residents, of which:
 1. % are from LSOAs
 2. Age breakdown
 3. gender
- 3) That Skills for Life support (maths, English, ICT) is embedded within any skills roll out relating to logistics training;
- 4) That the 3MG development makes full use of apprenticeships;
- 5) That real case studies evidencing progression opportunities within the logistics sector are identified and positive promotion of these are

actively encouraged.

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Meeting ended at 9.13 p.m.