

Halton Borough Council

overview of authority

[Halton Borough Council](#) became a unitary council on 1 April 1998 and is situated adjacent to Liverpool and Warrington. It has a population of 121,700 and a small ethnic minority population comprises 0.6% of the total. It is an urban industrial area, which includes two major and similarly sized communities in the towns of Runcorn and Widnes, located on either side of the River Mersey and joined by a bridge.

The population of Halton is declining, particularly the younger element. The latest Government Deprivation Index ranks Halton as the 18th most deprived local authority in England and Wales. Eight of the council's 21 wards rank in the lowest 10% nationally in terms of income and child poverty. 28.3% of families are in receipt of housing benefit. Unemployment rates are amongst the highest in the North-West despite falling faster than the regional average in recent years.

Unemployment amongst people under the age of 25 is the 11th highest in England.

what has been achieved?

Halton Borough Council introduced its Local Transport Plan (LTP) and Bus Strategy in April 2001, after wide consultation with the community and key stakeholders. Two key aims were highlighted within that strategy:

- to maximise social inclusion; and
- to encourage sustainability.

Since the bus strategy was adopted, the council's integrated Transport Co-ordination Section has worked in partnership with transport operators and other agencies to improve the quality of services and facilities. Indeed, of the 13 challenging public transport targets within the strategy, all 11 that are directly within the council's control are on target.

However, during the last 2 years, recognising high deprivation levels, and the need to target services to key areas of need, the council has primarily focussed on tackling social exclusion through improvements to local transport services. In submitting a bid for beacon status, the council identified 4 key areas where innovation and partnership has had a direct impact on those targeted groups and individuals who do not have access to their own private transport.

These key areas are:

- Links and access to employment
- Pathfinder Post 16 Transport Partnership
- Accessible transport improvements; and
- Halton Travelsafe.

Links and access to employment

As a direct result of the research and consultation, the Links and access to employment project was developed. The strategy comprises of three parts:

- (i) improved bus services
- (ii) services for disabled employees
- (iii) personalised advice and innovative services through the Neighbourhood Travel Team (NTT).

The NTT is a specialist team working within the Transport Co-ordination section, tackling transport needs at grass roots level. The council believes this is the first of its type in the country. The mission statement of the NTT is:

"the NTT will implement carefully targeted improvements to the transport network at ground level by increasing use of existing services, redirecting resources for supported bus services, and developing innovative schemes with employers, community groups and transport providers."

Pathfinders Post 16 Transport Partnership

The need for improvements to transport to further education was also identified as part of the Links and access to employment study, and also from informal meetings between transport providers, the colleges and council Transport Officers. In February 2002, the council's Transport Co-ordination section was the driving force behind a new and effective partnership, created to maximise co-ordination opportunities for post 16 students.

Accessible transport improvements

A successful partnership between the council and Halton Community Transport (HCT) has enabled the increasing demand for specialised transport to largely being met. Simultaneously, and in response to comments from public transport users, the council is working in partnership with bus operators to maximise the accessibility of the network. An accessibility audit of services and facilities is currently underway, with residents with disabilities on the working group. Their findings will inform the council's Accessibility Strategy, to form part of the LTP for 2006/7 to 2011/12.

Halton Travelsafe

Concerns about personal safety, particularly from those who use buses in the evening, regularly surface. Much progress has been made in 2002/03 to address these concerns and make the network safer, and the council now has a Travelsafe Strategy, which brings together all of the complimentary measures being pursued.

Service delivery tips

- Transport barriers for disadvantaged groups and individuals will not be tackled solely by reliance on commercially provided bus services. Direct intervention is required, together with funding packages, to tackle specific identified problems.
- No one agency 'owns' the responsibility of ensuring residents who do not have their own private transport can access services. As such, no one agency has a sole responsibility of tackling social exclusion through improvements to the transport network. Partnership working is required to identify common problems, reach the target groups and deliver practical and funded solutions that will remove barriers.
- A co-ordinated team approach to integrated transport will ensure that new targeted services will compliment the main public transport network. It will also ensure that at least one organisation keeps an eye on 'the wider picture'.

Open day and future learning activities

Conferences on the key themes indicated above and joint conferences with other beacon authorities. In addition there will be invitations to other local authorities to shadow council officers

Halton Borough Council open day - Thursday 14th October 2004

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