

**REPORT TO:** Employment Learning and Skills and  
Community Policy Performance Board

**DATE:** 26<sup>th</sup> March 2012

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, Children and Enterprise

**PORTFOLIO:** Economic Development

**SUBJECT:** The Halton Employment Partnership (HEP)  
and Tesco Extra Stores recruitment project

**WARDS:**

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide an update on the HEP/Tesco Extra Store recruitment project which the Halton Employment Partnership is currently supporting with the aim of supporting local unemployed people into jobs at the new Widnes store.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That**

- (1) the report is noted;
- (2) Members recognise HEP as the key agent for the delivery and implementation of large scale recruitment projects within the borough.

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **3.1 Background**

The Halton Employment Partnership (HEP) was approached in May 2011 to meet with the Regeneration Partnership Manager of Tesco Stores Limited and Job Centre Plus (Merseyside) to discuss the recruitment of staff to the Tesco Widnes store set to open in March 2012 and the support HEP could offer to this recruitment drive. Since HEP has a commitment to assist local people into local jobs and to support inward investors, after an initial meeting, it was agreed that HEP would support Tesco with their Regeneration Partnership programme of pre employment training and recruitment.

Between June and November 2011, 5 planning meetings took place between Tesco Stores Limited and HEP (including representatives from the Employment, Learning and Skills Division of Halton Borough Council, Job Centre Plus, Riverside College, Skills Funding Agency, and the National Apprenticeship Service). Discussions covered many aspects of the Regeneration programme and, in particular, what part HEP partners

could play in supporting the employer with this unique approach to pre employment training and recruitment. As a result of the discussions and planning meetings, a delivery programme was agreed between partners as follows:

- 1 Promotion of Programme (2 weeks)/Opening of Hotline (open 1 week)
- 2 Tesco Open Days (1 week)
- 3 Interview Skills Workshops (2 weeks)
- 4 Interviews (2 weeks)
- 5 Induction Day
- 6 Pre Employment Training (6 weeks)

(The store opening date that staff are currently working towards is 26 March 2012. However, staff are conscious that this date is open to change if the schedule for the building and fitting of the store should alter.)

### **3.2 Promotion of the Tesco Programme and Opening of Hotline**

HEP partners were proactive in promoting the Tesco programme to their organisations and networks, and in preparing their learners, clients and unemployed residents to apply for the programme. In order to be as fair as possible with regard to potential participants gaining a place on the programme, the employer required that partners set up a Hotline through which the initial applications could be made.

Job Centre Plus (JCP) set up and staffed this facility which was based in Widnes JCP offices. The criteria for obtaining a place on the programme were that applicants needed to be local residents, and that they should not have been in employment for over 6 months. This meant that not only JSA and benefits claimants could make an application, but anyone who had not been in paid work including, for example, mothers wishing to return to work after having a family.

A HEP information leaflet was produced to promote the programme and the Hotline number, and circulated throughout the community via the HEP Group and other networks in the 2 weeks prior to the opening of the Hotline on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2011. The Hotline was open for 5 days and all 1000 places were allocated before the end of the week.

The first 1000 qualifying applicants were offered a place at one of a number of Open Days to be held by Tesco in Widnes and supported by HEP in the week beginning 28<sup>th</sup> November 2011.

### **3.3 Tesco Open Days**

The Open Days were held at Kingsway Learning Centre in Widnes, and were organised, hosted and supported by the Employment, Learning and Skills Division (ELS) of Halton Borough Council, working closely with

Job Centre Plus. The Open Days were held in the week of 28th November 2011.

The 1 hour sessions included a presentation co-delivered by Tesco's Regeneration Partnership Manager, the HEP Manager and the ELS Employability and Skills for Life Curriculum Manager. The presentation included information on:

- Working for Tesco Stores Limited
- The opening of the Widnes store
- The Regeneration Partnership programme
- Interview Skills workshops and Skills for Life assessments
- The interview process
- The delivery and content of the pre employment training, including work experience
- Gaining employment with Tesco

Fifteen Open Day sessions were held in total and all attendees were invited to attend one of a series of Interview Skills Workshops. 739 attendees signed up and committed to attend the Interview Skills Workshops to be held in December. The Tesco Regeneration Partnership Manager confirmed that everyone who attended the skills workshops would then be promised an interview with Tesco.

### **3.4 Interview Skills Workshops**

The Interview Skills Workshops were delivered by ELS staff during the weeks of 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> December 2011, again at the Kingsway Learning Centre. Nineteen workshops were delivered in all and a total of 635 people participated in this important part of the recruitment programme.

The 3 hour Interview Skills workshops included:

- Skills for Life Numeracy and Literacy tests (Basic Skills Agency initial assessment)
- a session on interview skills and techniques to prepare individuals for the Tesco interview,
- the completion of a Tesco application form by each attendee

At this point, each individual was given the opportunity to sign up for a pre arranged interview with Tesco HR staff to be held in the weeks commencing 9<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> January 2012. 634 attendees signed up for interview slots before leaving the workshops.

This phase involved a great deal of planning and organisation for both delivery and support staff within the ELS Division. HEP were responsible for:

- Hiring of rooms and organisation of equipment and resources
- The design of the skills workshops in conjunction with the Tesco Manager
- The delivery of 19 workshops

- The completion and inputting of Learner Agreements onto a bespoke database
- The administering of the Skills for Life assessments
- The marking of 1270 Skills for Life assessments and the recording and analysis of the results
- Supporting each workshop by 'meeting and greeting' and signing in attendees, and providing administrative support to the Tesco Manager.

### **3.5 Interviews**

Employment, Learning and Skills Managers and support staff worked closely with the Tesco Manager to organise the 2 weeks of interviews for which candidates had signed up to at the end of each of the skills workshops. Interviews were held at the Kingsway Learning Centre in early January 2012. A team of Tesco staff interviewed 602 candidates over the 2 week period, completing an average of 60 interviews per day. Again ELS and JCP staff supported the process by 'meeting and greeting' candidates, signing them in, copying identity documents, and providing administrative support to the Tesco Partnership Manager and her staff.

A team of ELS staff produced all the interview outcome letters working to very tight timescales. A single posting date for all the letters was agreed so that all candidates would find out the result of their interviews at the same time. It was important to inform candidates of the result of their application as soon as possible after the interviews had finished so that those invited on to the pre employment training were able to attend an Induction Day scheduled for 26<sup>th</sup> January 2012.

HEP partners were conscious that those candidates who were unsuccessful in their application would need some further support with their job searching and/or improving their employability skills. Therefore partners produced 2 leaflets containing information on a variety of courses being delivered in the Borough which would assist in improving employability skills and/or gaining qualifications. The leaflet also contained a number of useful contact telephone numbers and website addresses, including the Next Step service. These leaflets were sent to the unsuccessful candidates with their letter.

### **3.6 Induction Day (26 January 2012)**

An induction day was organised for 26<sup>th</sup> January for the 100 successful candidates who had been invited on to the pre employment training. Two sessions were scheduled, one for the morning and one for the afternoon, and were supported by ELS and JCP staff. The sessions were held at the Runcorn campus of Riverside College where the 6 weeks of training will take place.

The Tesco Regeneration Manager and the Skills for Life & Employability Curriculum Manager led on the 2 sessions. An overview of the 6 week training and work experience programme to prepare the candidates for working within a Tesco store was delivered and a site induction undertaken.

### **3.7 Pre Employment Training**

The pre employment training began on 30 January 2012. The candidates have been placed in one of 4 groups. Each group will be undertaking two and half days training/work experience in each of the 6 weeks of the training. ELS staff will be working closely with the Tesco Regeneration Partnership Manager who will co deliver some elements of the training and organise the work experience which will be undertaken in a nearby Tesco store.

***N.B. this is an interim report only as the project is ongoing. A full report and an evaluation of the project will be completed in April 2012 once the project is complete.***

### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

See section 6.2

### **5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

Financial

The Tesco Regeneration Partnership initiative allocates a proportion of Section 106 monies for the recruitment of long term unemployed people within the community. The monies ensure that the bespoke requirements expected by Tesco are delivered.

### **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

#### **6.1 Children and Young People in Halton**

The project will target those aged 18+.

#### **6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**

This HEP/Tesco Regeneration Partnership training and recruitment project clearly supports the Council's overall aim for the area of Employment, Learning and Skills:

*To create an economically prosperous borough that encourages investment, enterprise and business growth, and improves the opportunities for learning and development together with the skills and*

*employment prospects of both residents and workforce so that they are able to feel included socially and financially.*

The project also strongly contributes to the following Areas of Focus:

*Area of Focus 5 – Strong Local Economy*

*To develop a strong, diverse, competitive and sustainable local economy.*

*Area of Focus 6 – Skilled Local Workforce*

*To develop a culture where learning is valued and skill levels throughout the adult population and across the local workforce can be raised.*

*Area of Focus 7 – Increased Local Employment*

*To promote and increase the employability of local people and tackle barriers to employment to get more people into work.*

### **6.3 A Healthy Halton**

None.

### **6.4 A Safer Halton**

None.

### **6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal**

The construction of the Tesco Extra store is part of the wider development around Widnes Retail Park/Widnes Waterfront, which has regenerated previously unused industrial land and created new employment opportunities.

## **7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

Failure by HEP to have delivered on the Tesco Extra recruitment project could have meant the 100 jobs earmarked for long term unemployed local people being awarded to non Halton residents.

## **8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

The Halton Employment Partnership operates within the LSP framework, which in turn operates under the Council's Equality and Diversity policy.

## **9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None under the meaning of the Act