

Employment, Learning & Skills SSP

Minutes of Executive Group Meeting 30th July 2012

2.30 pm, Runcorn Campus, Riverside College

Present:

Wesley Rourke (In the Chair)
Simon Clough
Diane Sproson
Nick Mannion
Cleo Pollard
Janine Peterson
Mal Hampson
Hazel Coen
Siobhan Saunders
Jayne Smith
Helen Woollacott
Peter Finney

Organisation:

Economy, Enterprise & Property (HBC)
Children & Young People (HBC)
Greater Merseyside Connexions
Strategic Policy & Partnership (HBC)
Halton Parents & Carers Forum
Jobcentre Plus
Halton Speak Out!
Performance & Improvement (HBC)
Employment, Learning & Skills (HBC)
Riverside College
Skills Funding Agency
National Apprenticeship Service

Apologies had been received from:

Claire Bradbury	Power in Partnership
David Gray	Welfare Rights (HBC)
Hitesh Patel	Halton CAB
Cllr Sue Edge	Chair of HBC ELS Policy & Performance Board
Cllr Eddie Jones	Portfolio Holder, Halton BC
Kevin Smith	Riverside College, Halton
Catherine Johnson	Performance & Improvement (HBC)
Sue Baxendale	Halton Housing Trust
Claire Jones	Halton & St Helens CVA
Paula Cain	Halton Chamber

1. Welcome/Introductions

- 1.1 The Chair, Wesley Rourke, welcomed everyone to the meeting, and took the opportunity to put on record his thanks to Kevin Smith for chairing the meeting.
- 1.2 There were no personal or pecuniary declarations of interest.

2. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting on Monday 14th May 2012 were reviewed and confirmed as accurate and the following matters were not covered elsewhere on the agenda;

- 2.1 Flexible Support Fund (9.1) JobCentrePlus hosted a briefing session at Halton Lea on 18th June. See 3.4 for detail.

3. Partner Updates

3.1 Halton Housing Trust (NM on behalf of SB). HHTs Current and planned work on ELS includes;

- Has set up a number of strategic projects to help us deal with the impact of the Welfare Reform changes to their customers and HHT.
- On Employment and Skills, one project is 'Supporting Customers into Employment' that is addressing worklessness among HHT customers. Will target over 100 customers of various ages who have indicated interest in assistance HHT can give them to get into training and employment. The scope of the project is to:
 - work with partners in relation to volunteering opportunities
 - work with customers to maximize training and employment opportunities.
 - identify and apply for potential funding opportunities which HHT or its customers can access.
 - review customer profiling data so that data captured helps to target of customers seeking employment and or training opportunities.
 - develop digital inclusion training for customers to increase and widen those able to access it.
- HHT also working on a number of other initiatives including a Youth Forum Group (with a number of partners), a National Housing Federation bid in terms of apprenticeships and opportunities in the social housing sector, working with the NHF and LCR Worklessness Networks, participating in discussions with other HA's and Riverside College, and through the HEP to identify and maximise opportunities and funding.
- Finally, HHT exploring opportunities and funding available to improve the skills of its existing workforce, especially in terms of basic skills for lower skilled employees.

3.2 Halton & St Helens CVA (NM on behalf of CJ).

- A major consultation exercise currently underway regarding the refurbishment and redevelopment of St Marie's (a former church) in Widnes, subject of an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- CJ asks that members take five minutes to complete the online survey and also pass-on the details to friends and colleagues. More details about the project are at www.stmarieschurch.com
- Survey itself at <http://www.haltonsthelensvca.org.uk/st-maries-church-redevelopment-0>

Action; NM to circulate details of the links to members of the group.

3.3 Halton Speak Out (VH). VH detailed the work of the organisation, a self-advocacy group of people with learning difficulties speaking out for themselves. One objective is to increase access to paid employment opportunities. Website; <http://haltonsspeakout.wordpress.com/>

3.4 Job Centre Plus (JP); currently about to commence pre- recruitment process for new 'Hungry Horse' pub/restaurant in north Widnes. Also in discussion with a potential new employer that is considering an employment side in Preston Brook area of Runcorn that may lead to 300 new job opportunities. Disappointment that would be using a training provider from outside Halton.

Action; JP to keep members updated on progress.

- Discussions around capacity of our local providers to respond to large scale requirements, often at short notice.

- HW: The market is now extremely competitive with some providers and consortia taking advantage of the freedoms and flexibilities to seek contracts on a national basis. However, when successful some larger providers look to sub-contract a proportion of the work to a local provider.
- WR; Asked the question of how do we respond to the challenge?
- HW; We need to ensure our 'offer' and capacity to deliver it meets the needs of the market (employers) – we can make sure we are competitive by using the collective breadth and depth of our partners' knowledge and resources.
- JP; Flexible Support Fund – There have been some changes since then with a focus on commissioning low value/ad hoc contracts to meet local gaps in mainstream provision rather than grants. Will forward additional information as/when available.

3.5 HBC (SC); Groundwork Trust have won a strand of the Youth Contract to deliver NEET activities in Cheshire East & West, Warrington and the LCR authority areas.

Groundwork have agreed the delivery model with HBC for Halton which will consist primarily of a mentoring programme. Mentors will work with young people currently accessing existing provision. Groundwork will employ Riverside Housing and Rathbone Training to deliver the service in Halton. Referrals via the two NEET groups. Young people are only able to access this provision if they do not hold any GCSE's at grade C or above. The contract runs for three years.

- 3.6 Riverside College (JS); the adult prospectus was launched on 9th July and can be downloaded from [HERE](#). Apprenticeship recruitment is running slightly below that for last year, but encouraging volume of enquiries from SME's. The more generous financial package being offered by some neighbouring local authorities is clearly a factor. Also, pending change from grants to a loan regime for students aged 25 and over is a major consideration.
- SS; took opportunity to outline an application for residual WNF funds that will provide support for local employers to take on a second or subsequent apprentice within the three year period that rules them ineligible for grants via the NAS.
 - WR; advised that a decision will be taken at the SSP chairs meeting next week. Also, that we should not restrict our efforts to increase apprenticeship take-up numbers to the private sector but, also seek out opportunities in the public and not-for-profit sectors.
 - HW; suggested that the project should complement and/or 'fill a gap' rather than compete with current provision. Also need to be sensitive about use of public money to support public sector employment in current environment.
 - SC; reminded the meeting that such local initiatives have worked well in past band have been a useful tool to engage with SME's. However, there are cost issues with apprenticeships in STAM sector. At other end of spectrum is social care where levels of are very low and need raising.
 - JP; Social care sector has major external image issues amongst jobseekers. We also need to avoid getting fixed upon 'chasing the money' rather than helping to deliver sustainable outcomes.

Action; Details of apprenticeship project to be circulated when outcome known

3.7 Skills Funding Agency (HW): successful providers for the LCR are being invited to a briefing on 22nd August with aim of ensuring clarity of performance, monitoring and payment regimes..

4. Review of ELS Partnership Action Plan

- 4.1 NM outlined process used to produce the draft revised Action Plan. This is the outcome of a considerable amount of work by several partners to update each of the five priorities around current and planned activities. However, whilst the plan is now about 90% complete, there are still some gaps to fill. The Skills sub-group is to review Priorities 1 and 3 at its meeting later in the week and NM will also be meeting with the library service for their input.
- 4.2 DS: One small amendment required is to insert Connexions Greater Merseyside as the lead delivery partner for the National Careers Service in Halton, with HBC's HPIJ a sub-contractor.
- 4.3 WR: Plan looks better than previously, and suggested progress reports come to alternate meetings, inter-spaced with the six-monthly performance reports.

Actions;

- a) **Draft Action Plan approved subject to minor amendments. NM to circulate final version electronically.**
- b) **Progress reports to be brought at six-monthly intervals.**

5. Liverpool City Deal.

- 5.1 WR delivered a briefing on the background to the city deal concept which is part of the Government's localism agenda. The Liverpool City Region 'deal', agreed between the city region and Government in February 2012, is the first of several that are now in place across the country. Such deals see Government inviting a city to put forward an offer in return for greater freedoms and flexibilities.

The LCR deal included additional responsibilities, and some funding, along with the recommendation to Liverpool City Council that it adopt a Mayoral governance system. Whilst the 'Mayoral' City Deal attracted most of the media's attention; it should be seen alongside the wider City Region deal, with all partners and Local Authorities (including Liverpool) playing a full part in the wider City Region deal.

The core objective of these deals is to be a driver for accelerated growth and prosperity. A number of helpful actions have been agreed at the city region level, and the partnership needs to understand the local implications - how we can contribute and how we can make it work for us.

- 5.3 NM; queried how the performance of the deal will be evidenced and measured.

WR; advised that nothing concrete in place on this issue yet. However, the city deal allows for resources to be directed towards partners that actually delivering on key objectives. Also which little actual extra money, there is now the freedom on how it is used. This will be the situation, at least for the duration of current Parliament.

CP; Raised the issue about whether Liverpool's issues and priorities are also Halton's?

WR; is room for some local flexibility, and deal is helpful on the ESF funding issue as Halton now firmly embedded within the LCR.

Action; WR to circulate a note on the 'Deal for Jobs & Skills'

6. Halton Employment Day; 6th July 2012.

6.1 NM introduced a report outlining the background to this event and that the eventual 'product' on the day was somewhat removed from the original concept that was found to be impractical. However, did deliver 'bums on seats'

6.2 SC; found the DVD that Halton BC's CEO introduced was very positive and quite inspiring.

WR: Useful experience and started the process of getting the message out of what the 'Halton Offer' is to employers.

HW + SS: We need to build on it, looking at positives AND negatives. One example was poor quality of the attendance list which stopped any immediate follow-up.

WR: An 'economic forum' is being planned for some time in the autumn and the learning points from this event will be noted.

7. Future remit of the Executive Group

7.1 WR explained why he had put this item on the agenda. With the end of the strategic WNF project monitoring role that was a major element in previous years, and the effective performance of HEP and skills sub-groups need to consider how we can get the most from meetings.

Whilst the winding-up the SSP is not suggested, nor is it an option under the current constitution of the HSP and Halton's sustainable community strategy, we can change the format of how we make best use of the expertise of those around the table.

One option would be to have a thematic focus to meetings, say based on the priorities in our Action Plan. Another would be to pick-up some of the lessons learned from the enhanced partnership working exercise last year to eliminate overlaps/duplication/gaps and optimise delivery within available resources.

7.2 DS: The thematic approach has recently been adopted by the Childrens' Trust and seems to be working well.

HW: Thematic ok, we can use our action plan as the 'peg' to hang on. Can also invite outside experts and colleagues to see how they approach the issue to see if we can learn from them.

CP: A thematic approach would be more accessible and relevant to those members not directly involved in service delivery.

JP: The Halton approach is one of the stronger partnerships in LCR and has a strong collective Voice, with wide participation across all key areas and services. Need to build on this.

Action; WR/NM to draft and circulate a suggested thematic timetable' for the remaining three Exec Group 2012/3 meetings

8. Sub Group Updates

8.1 SS drew the group's attention to the key issues on the notes of the latest meetings of the partnership's Skills sub-group and the HEP

Also provided a brief summary of the requirement for the shortlisted consortia for the Mersey Gateway to include an Employment & Skills strategy with their submissions – deadline for which is late August. Whilst Merseylink consortium has been very actively engaged with the HEP and other groups, one has been less so and from the third nothing yet has been heard. This despite invitations to work with HEP.

Action; SS to circulate copies of the respective Employment & Skills strategies when/if submitted by the consortia bidding for the Mersey Gateway contract.

9. Any Other URGENT Business.

- 9.1 SC raised the issue of the apprenticeship group's future – is it still required or can its work be picked-up by the skills sub-group?

Action; SC and SS to discuss remit of apprenticeship group being taken on by skills sub-group and report outcome to next meeting.

10. Future meetings

Monday 22nd October 2012 – Kingsway Learning Centre, Widnes.

Monday 10th December 2012 – Kingsway Learning Centre, Widnes.

Monday 11th February 2013 – Kingsway Learning Centre, Widnes.

Start time 14:00