

REPORT TO: Employment, Learning & Skills PPB

DATE: 26 June 2017

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Enterprise, Community & Resources

PORTFOLIO: Employment, Learning & Skills

SUBJECT: **Liverpool City Region Combined Authority** Employees Support in Skills (ESF) project overview

WARDS: Liverpool City Region wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Board members with an overview of the ESF Employees Support in Skills project, which Halton Borough Council's Employment, Learning & Skills Division is managing on behalf of the Combined Authority.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Halton Borough Council currently holds the Chair position for the Liverpool City Region Apprenticeship Hub and is responsible for the management of the Hub's activities, financial and personnel resources on behalf of the Combined Authority and Local Enterprise Partnership
- 3.2 Over recent years, young people and adults across Halton and the wider Liverpool City Region have benefitted from an integrated programme of activity, led or supported by the Liverpool City Region Apprenticeship Hub including:
- An events programme to encourage Apprenticeship take-up by employers, young people and adults (e.g. LCR Apprenticeship Graduation Ceremony, National Apprenticeship Week events in each Borough and related year round marketing and signposting via the Apprenticeship Hub website: <http://apprenticeshipwork.org.uk/>). Plus awareness raising about how to access an apprenticeship through working with schools, colleges and parents/carers and guardians;
 - The Skills Show @ the International Festival of Business 2014 (over 3,500 young people from across LCR attended this hands-on series of 'have a go' events with c.100 employers giving up their time to take part) and a series of 1 day pathways events accompanied this to

provide practical careers education to Year 9 learners on the careers available in manufacturing and engineering (titled Robot Challenge Days); and;

- A supporting suite of labour market intelligence products titled 'Skills for Growth' produced with employers and training providers to inform curriculum planning and careers education.

3.3 In the summer of 2016, Halton Borough Council, on behalf of the Combined Authority submitted a competitive bid for a Skills Funding Agency ESF allocation of £875,000, to deliver a series of Apprenticeship Hub related activities (under the Employees Support in Skills project name) to include:

- Further Apprenticeship promotion capacity funding, with a focus on preparing employers and training providers for Apprenticeship Reform;
- Skills Show related activity to inspire and engage young people in understanding their future careers opportunities; and
- Labour market intelligence including research and policy work to understand Liverpool City Region's skills supply and demand and improve economic growth by creating a more productive workforce.

3.4 The bid was successful and the contract was officially awarded in January 2017; however, it wasn't until the end of February 2017 that the first meeting with the Skills Funding Agency took place to agree project details. Halton then started the process of recruiting 4 staff to drive forward the project and the staff started in post on 8 May 2017.

3.5 The project is funded on a payment by results model; as targets/outputs are achieved, financial claims are then submitted.

3.6 The contract runs until the end of July 2018.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Liverpool City Region Apprenticeship Hub has been operating as a collaborative partnership for a number of years now, with the aim to increase the awareness, volumes and quality of Apprenticeships available to residents of the City Region. Its primary focus is to support and co-ordinate City Region Apprenticeship activities and events.

4.2 The Apprenticeship Hub's Strategy and Strategic Action Plan for 2015-2020 was launched during National Apprenticeship Week in March 2016 following approval at the city region's Employment & Skills Board on behalf of the Local Enterprise Partnership. The principles and aims include:-

- Contributing to the Government's target of 3 million new starts by 2020;
- Promoting Apprenticeships as high quality career development;

- Ensuring Apprenticeships are aligned to meet the current and future needs of the local economy; and
 - Raising quality standards and improving success rates, making the Apprenticeship brand stronger and attractive to employers and young people.
- 4.3 The Government has now started to roll out its Apprenticeship Funding Reforms in England, which include: tax implications for the private and public sector associated with a new Apprenticeship Levy; a 2.3% Apprenticeship target for public sector organisations; and the introduction of a 'voucher' system and Digital Apprenticeship Service.
- 4.4 The ESF via Skills Funding Agency will allow for an additional resource to implement the strategy across the city region and to support Liverpool City Region in implementing the Apprenticeship Funding Reforms.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Apprenticeship Hub and the Employees Support in Skills Project is externally funded through an ESF/SFA allocation.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Young people across the city region, including Halton, will have access to a range of apprenticeship opportunities supported by the Apprenticeship Hub.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

The Apprenticeship Hub has 3 key priority areas of work which aim to promote the growth and type of apprenticeships in the city region and therefore support employment, learning and skills:

- Employers
- Learners
- Providers

6.3 A Healthy Halton None

6.4 A Safer Halton None

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal None

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 There is a potential risk that the Council would be responsible for any claw back of funding arising from, for example, ineligible activities, underperformance and or underspend on the project. To minimise this risk, 'back to back', contracts with providers/delivery agencies will be developed to ensure that this risk is reduced. It is worth noting that Halton Borough Council already has comprehensive processes in place for managing European Funded projects and, therefore, the risk is considered to be low.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 The Apprenticeship Hub is a city region resource to support young people and their families in all matters relating to apprenticeships. The Hub includes representation from all local authorities, Merseyside Colleges' Association, the Greater Merseyside Learning Providers' Federation, Skills Funding Agency, Higher Education and employers and members are there to act on behalf of their respective beneficiaries to ensure equal access to the Hub's resources. The Hub also has its own website www.apprenticeshipwork.org.uk