

EMPLOYMENT, LEARNING AND SKILLS, AND COMMUNITY POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Employment, Learning and Skills, and Community Policy and Performance Board on Monday, 20 November 2023 in the Boardroom - Municipal Building, Widnes

Present: Councillors Jones (Chair), Teeling (Vice-Chair), Ball, Garner, S. Hill, Hutchinson, Rowe, Ryan and Stretch

Apologies for Absence: Councillor C. Plumpton Walsh

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: A. Jones, S. Saunders, S. McDonald, J. Gallagher, T. Booth, P. Corner and L. Carr

Also in attendance: None

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

	<i>Action</i>
ELS18 MINUTES	
The Minutes from the meeting held on 19 September 2023, were taken as read and signed as a correct record.	
ELS19 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME	
It was confirmed that no public questions had been received.	
ELS20 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES	
The Executive Board minutes relating to the Employment, Learning and Skills, and Community portfolio were presented to the Board for information.	
RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.	
ELS21 THE BIG CONVERSATION UPDATE	
The Board received a report of the Chief Executive's Delivery Unit, which provided an update on 'The Big Conversation'.	

The Big Conversation was about engaging with the public so that they understood the challenges that the Council was facing. It was an approach between the Council and those who lived or worked in Halton to work together to create an improved Borough in all aspects of everyday life. A stakeholder analysis and a Communications Plan was developed in order to generate and establish as many opportunities as possible to involve all stakeholders in many different ways.

Members were advised that to date a total of 1000+ responses had been received; a breakdown of these by source was provided. The report outlined the promotion, consultation and engagement carried out in the community so far. The themes emerging from the consultation were also presented and any gaps were highlighted, as well as the actions required to fill these.

It was noted that the consultation ends on 30 November 2023, after which an analysis would be undertaken to identify the key priorities. January and February 2024 would see further consultation with stakeholders prior to the Corporate Plan being finalised in March, ready for its launch in April 2024.

The following responses were provided in response to Members' questions:

- Two thirds of Halton Borough Council staff lived in the Borough, so were included in the responses;
- There was a low response from the 16-24 year old age group so staff had visited Riverside, Carmel, Priestley and Sir John Dean Colleges, the Vikings and Linnets Clubs, and the Family Hubs in Runcorn and Widnes to try to boost the numbers;
- It was felt that the fact that youth clubs were missing from communities made it difficult to engage with younger age groups;
- Two iwalkers were used on one day at a cost of £1,200, in order to encourage participation in areas identified as having low responses; and
- It was predicted that although the 'working towards a greener future' theme was the least priority currently, this may change once the responses from the 16-24 age group were boosted.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) note the report; and

- 2) continue to endorse the approach to facilitate 'The Big Conversation'.

ELS22 BUSINESS GROWTH PROGRAMME COMPLETION & BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICE LAUNCH

The Board received an update on the performance and closure of the Business Growth Programme phase three and were introduced to the Business Support Service (BBS), funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

The Business Growth Programme was a business support initiative that had been running in three phases since 2014, with phase 3 ending on 30 June 2023. The report outlined in detail the aim of the Programme, the work carried out with Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's) and the challenges faced along the way by the Council and the SME's. Members were also presented with the achievements of the Business Growth Programme and noted that performance was 7% above target for the number of businesses supported, despite being impacted by several lockdowns during the pandemic.

Members were advised that the replacement for the Business Growth Programme funding was the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF).

The Council's Business Investment and Growth Team (together with the other LCR authorities, LCR Growth Platform and LCRCA) would work in partnership to deliver Place Based Business Support using lessons learned from the ERDF Business Growth Programme. The aim was to deliver business support at the local level through direct commissioned delivery and by linking businesses into the wider SPF programmes and other support initiatives in the LCR.

The following information was provided following Members' questions:

- Clarity was provided on the eligibility criteria for the Business Support Service, as there was an error in presentation when one slide was taken in isolation, however it was clarified that the Programme was for new business start-ups that were eligible to use the service as well as established businesses;
- One specific example of where help was needed was provided by one Member; the contact details would be passed to the Officer following the meeting;
- Copies of the flyers being used to promote the

service would be sent to Members once they were released;

- A commissioned contractor would provide a dedicated business start role from January 2024;
- It was suggested to share the information regarding the Service with all departments and staff within the Council and that this should come from the Executive Director;
- Information on the types of business start-ups and businesses in Halton was requested, to assist Members and help give a better idea of the prospects of them;
- The person who starts a business did not count towards the employment numbers, as they are not classed as being an employee of that business according to the Combined Authority monitoring criteria for this Programme;
- Banks were a key source of information for new start-ups and the Council did engage with these at networking events for example;
- New start ups were informed of the employer's and employee's Charter when they employed staff;
- Business rates were discussed – it was noted that people could work from home using one room and be exempt from paying business rates;
- The total funding for the BSS was £366k until March 2025, covering all elements of the Programme including commissioned services for start-up and separate consultancy (7 further strands of support) advice for established businesses;
- The team did work with foreign direct investment whereby businesses locate from overseas, offering advice such as recruitment and legal; and
- The BSS would provide better value for money – a clearer picture of this would be known by March 2025. An interim report and update would be brought to the Board in 6 months' time.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) note the report; and
- 2) a progress report be submitted to the Board in 6 months' time.

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

ELS23 HALTON PEOPLE INTO JOBS – TRANSITION FROM ENGAGING WITH UNEMPLOYED HALTON RESIDENTS TO ECONOMICALLY INACTIVE RESIDENTS

The Board considered a report of the Executive

Director – Environment and Regeneration, which provided an overview of the current services provided by Halton People into Jobs (HPIJ) and its future focus to engage with more economically inactive residents for *Ways to Work* and the new *Work and Health Pioneer Programme*.

The report outlined the definitions of being 'economically inactive' in the context of each of the above Programmes and it was noted that the Programmes were voluntary, for individuals that met the respective economically inactive criteria, and were looking to start work in the immediate future.

Members were provided with data on the economically inactive population in Halton between July 22 to July 23 which showed a comparison with regional and national figures. Also, performance and achievements for both Programmes so far was presented.

Further information was given, following Members' questions:

- HPIJ and the Regeneration and Business Growth Teams often liaised with each other, as there was some crossover with the services;
- Clients' requesting business start-up help via the HPIJ services were signposted to the relevant departments for assistance;
- Information on 'Access to Work' was provided to employers in contact with HPIJ;
- People who wanted to work (shown on the data as 4,200 in the Borough) used a variety of methods to look for work independently, so only a small portion of these came to HPIJ and Job Centre Plus (JCP);
- Those who did use HPIJ to look for assistance in getting a job did so voluntarily and completed a 100 question diagnostic first, to determine any issues that might require dealing with prior to searching for work – such as mental health problems, physical health problems and benefit payments;
- An affordability exercise was also completed for each client, to ensure they would not lose out financially by returning to work; and
- It was felt that the WHP Pioneer Programme target of 28 paid job outcomes was low, in comparison to the number of people looking for work (4,200) – it was explained that this was due to the complexity of clients the service dealt with. It was also a pilot programme so numbers could be revised in time.

In conclusion, Members were presented with two good new stories, one from the Ways to Work Programme and one from the Work and Health Pioneer Programme.

RESOLVED: That the report is noted.

ELS24 HALTON'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY

The Board received an update on the activities and events planned for Halton's 50th Anniversary, on 1 April 2024.

It was announced that in order to recognise this momentous occasion, plans had been made for HBC, external organisations and groups, to hold activities and events throughout 2024. The aim was to involve as many schools, local community groups and individuals as possible, and small grants would be available to assist in the planning and delivery of activities. It was noted that a temporary externally funded Culture Officer post had been created, utilising UK Share Prosperity Funding. They would assist in the preparations for the celebrations and work along side colleagues in Leisure Services.

The latest information on the activities and events planned was provided to Members in table format, starting from January 2024 through to December 2024. During debate the following comments were made:

- Reference to 'Runcorn Day' would be removed following feedback;
- A discussion regarding the return of the Vintage Rally at Victoria Park took place. To date, Officers had been unable to contact the organisers. One Member offered to provide the contact details for them. It was the consensus of the Board that every effort should be made to secure the Event for next September 2024;
- There were plans for permanent installations, one on either side of the bridge – all primary schools in Halton had been invited to participate in the design of tiles;
- It was important to advertise and promote these events as much as possible;
- Norton Priory had many events planned but felt that it was difficult to get to for many residents – transport would be looked at;
- The events would be grant funded from Shared Prosperity and the Council's event budget;
- There was an opportunity to include multi-cultural

- aspects in many of the events planned;
- The venue for the June 2024 Halton 50 Main Event was to be decided; and
- The Remembrance Sunday Service would be removed from the list.

RESOLVED: That the report and comments made be noted.

ELS25 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT - QUARTER 2 OF 2023-34

The Board received the performance management reports for quarter two of 2023-24 (1 July 2023 to 30 September 2023) and were requested to consider and raise any questions or points of clarification in respect of these.

The key priorities for development or improvement in 2022-23 were agreed by Members and included in Directorate Plans for the various function areas reported to the Board as follows:

- Enterprise, Employment and Skills; and
- Community and Environment.

The report detailed progress against service objectives and milestones and performance targets and provided information relating to key developments and emerging issues that had arisen during the period.

RESOLVED: That the quarter two 2023-24 performance management reports be received.

Meeting ended at 9.00 p.m.