

## **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, 24 February 2025 in The Boardroom, Municipal Building, Widnes*

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Abbott, McDonough and Stretch

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: A. Jones, D. Cooke, K. Arrowsmith and H. Roberts

Also in attendance: T. Done & G. Heesom – Beacon Savings & Loans and J. Leake – Sci-Tech Daresbury

### **ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD**

|                                                                                                                                                                                    | <i>Action</i> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| ELS20 MINUTES                                                                                                                                                                      |               |
| The Minutes from the meeting held on 18 November 2024, were taken as read and signed as a correct record.                                                                          |               |
| It was noted that the outstanding queries referred to in ELS19 would be sent to Members following the meeting.                                                                     |               |
| ELS21 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME                                                                                                                                                         |               |
| It was confirmed that no public questions had been received.                                                                                                                       |               |
| ELS22 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES                                                                                                                                                      |               |
| The Executive Board minutes relating to the Employment, Learning and Skills, and Community portfolio published since the last meeting of this Board were attached for information. |               |

ELS23 PRESENTATION - HALTON CREDIT UNION - NOW CALLED WEAREBEACON

The Board received a presentation from Tracey Done and Gareth Heesom, from Beacon Savings and Loans (previously Halton Credit Union).

Beacon is a not for profit organisation that provides ethical products and services to those who struggled to get credit. It was governed by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) as banks and building societies were.

The change of name from Halton Credit Union was explained as being part of the re-branding of the service so that it was non-geographical, as it was expanding across the whole of Cheshire. Beacon's services were now available to anyone who lived or worked in Cheshire and some neighbouring areas such as Liverpool and Stoke on Trent.

The website and app were introduced to the Board and the services available included family loans, Save to Borrow, secured borrowing for high savers, a salary saving scheme with payroll partners, life insurance at no cost to Members, and a Christmas savings club.

The guests advised that Beacon also supported employees and employers, as one in four people worried about debt or money issues, which in turn could affect performance at work. The salary schemes offered helped employees to be able to afford loans and better manage their money.

Beacon did currently work with partners such as the NHS, the Council, nurseries and Chamber of Commerce, but wanted to partner with more businesses to offer the same services. Members noted this for use in their constituencies.

Copies of the Annual Report, Information Packs and business cards were distributed to the Board. The guests were invited to send a briefing note for inclusion in the Environment and Regeneration Department's newsletter. The guests were thanked for their informative presentation.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be received.

Executive Director  
Environment &  
Regeneration

The Board considered a report from the Executive Director – Environment and Regeneration, which provided an update on the delivery of Sci-Tech Daresbury's Talent and Skills Action Plan.

The Board welcomed Mr John Leake, the Business Growth Director for Sci-Tech Daresbury. He advised that the Sci-Tech Daresbury site was one of only 6 science and technology campuses in the UK and this was the only one in the North of England.

Sci-Tech Daresbury Talent and Skills Strategy was developed in 2021. It was a key component of the Sci-Tech Daresbury Strategy for Science, Innovation and Growth. The Strategy focussed on attracting, developing and retaining the wide range of skills and expertise essential to establishing Sci-Tech Daresbury as a global beacon of science and technology, focussed innovation and entrepreneurship.

The presentation outlined some of the key activities and recent successes, as well provided a summary of the priorities of the 2025 Action Plan.

Following the presentation, the Members received the following additional information in response to their questions:

- Public transport services were available to the site, with 3 bus services in operation;
- Although work experience take up for students was low to start with, in 2024, 12 places were awarded to students from Halton;
- There was collaboration with local companies and with schools but it was difficult to get into secondary schools due to their tight curriculums;
- John's team did have contact with the Lead Officer in the Council's 14-19 team, who assisted them with contacting secondary schools;
- It was challenging to get companies to adopt apprentices as a route to securing talent;
- Employees at the site came from a broad area, including Cheshire, Liverpool, Manchester and Wales, with some from Halton;
- A skills shortage existed in the whole of the UK not just in Halton; and
- Regarding future development of the site, it was felt that another access road would be needed.

Members were advised that a mapping assessment had been undertaken and professional advice stated that this was not needed.

Members comments on the future expansion of Sci-Tech Daresbury and the amount of additional infrastructure that would be needed to accommodate more companies and employees were noted.

Mr Leake was thanked for his informative presentation.

RESOLVED: That the report and comments made be noted.

#### ELS25 HALTON ADULT LEARNING SUMMARY – ACADEMIC YEAR 23/24

The Board received a report from the Executive Director, Environment and Regeneration, which provided an overview of the current services provided by Halton Adult Learning and provided a summary of the key performance indicators for the academic year 2023/24.

Halton's Adult Learning service delivered a range of accredited and non-accredited, community learning courses in Runcorn and Widnes, which aimed not only to improve residents lives, but also address the skills gaps in the Borough and across the Liverpool City Region (LCR). The service also delivered Family Learning in schools across Halton and co-ordinated the Pathways to Teaching Programme, on behalf of the LCR Combined Authority (LCRCA). Further, the Adult Learning team also co-delivered the Supported Internship Programme with Halton People into Jobs (HPIJ). This service aimed to improve the breadth of the curriculum offer in order to give adults within the Borough wider opportunities for development.

The overview included information on the following programmes:

- Maths, English and Digital Functional Skills;
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL);
- Education pathways;
- Test and Learn Programmes;
- Family Learning; and
- The Multiply initiative.

The report outlined the Adult Learning's performance and achievements. In relation to adult enrolments, these

had almost grown by 50% since 2021-22. Additionally, the retention rate overall across the service was good, at 91.1%. It was noted however, that there were concerns with the retention and achievement rates for Maths and English.

Members enquired about the promotion of the Adult Learning Service. This was done in the traditional way using brochures and flyers but it was also promoted by the staff running the service and on its Facebook page. The Family Learning Service was currently delivered by two qualified ex-primary school teachers.

In response to other questions, it was noted that funding for *Multiply*, a national initiative, would come to an end in March 2025. Also, clients were provided with feedback forms after using any of the services that came under Adult Learning.

Following a request, the e-version of the prospectus and the employer support information would be sent to the Board following the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be received and the curriculum intent and its alignment with the local skills context be noted.

Executive Director  
Environment &  
Regeneration

#### ELS26 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORTS FOR QUARTER 3 OF 2024/25

The Board received the performance management reports for quarter 3 of 2024-25 (1 October 2024 to 31 December 2024) 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 2024-25 were agreed by Members and 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. Members were invited to highlight any areas of interest and/or concern where further information is to be provided to a future meeting of the Board.

Members requested that an item on the Council's

'Connect to Halton' service for the use of agency staff be brought to the next meeting of the Board.

The Chair announced that a site visit to The Brindley Theatre had been arranged on 4 March 2025 at 11am; a calendar appointment would be sent.

RESOLVED: That the quarter 3 performance management reports be received.

Executive Director  
Environment &  
Regeneration

#### ELS27 COUNCILWIDE SPENDING AS AT 30 NOVEMBER 2024

The Board received a report from the Director of Finance, which gave the Council's overall revenue and capital spending position as at 30 November 2024, together with the latest 2024-25 outturn forecast.

On 16 January 2025, Executive Board received the attached report and appendices, which presented details of Councilwide revenue and capital spending by each department and outlined the reasons for key variances from budget.

Executive Board has requested that a copy of the report be shared with each Policy and Performance Board for information. This is to ensure that all Members had a full appreciation of the Councilwide financial position, in addition to their specific areas of responsibility.

RESOLVED: That the Councilwide financial position as outlined in the report be noted.

*Meeting ended at 9.00 p.m.*