

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

**DATE:** 6<sup>th</sup> January 2016

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, People & Economy

**PORTFOLIO:** Economic Development

**SUBJECT:** The Merseyside Business Support Programme  
Review

**WARD(S)** Borough-wide

**1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The purpose of the report is to update members with respect to the delivery of the Merseyside Business Support Programme within Halton

**2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:**

Members of the PPB notes the performance of the Merseyside Business Support Programme in Halton with respect to:-

1. Number of companies assisted by the Merseyside Business Support Programme;
2. Anticipated jobs created or safeguarded as a consequence of engaging with the Merseyside Business Support Programme.

**3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 Reports have previously been brought to this Board describing the proposed roll-out of the Merseyside Business Support Programme in the Borough of Halton.

3.2 The objective of the Merseyside Business Support Programme within Halton was to offer assistance to companies who had been trading for more than 12 months and who had the capacity to expand and increase their workforce.

3.3 The support provided by the Merseyside Business Support Programme consisted of an initial diagnostic phase followed, where appropriate, with specialist assistance in those areas identified as contributing to business growth.

3.4 The initial funding available for the implementation of the Merseyside Business Support Programme within Halton was

£381,852, with a 50% contribution from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and 50% provided by Halton Borough Council.

3.5 The implementation of the Merseyside Business Support Programme in Halton.

3.5.1 The delivery of the Merseyside Business Support Programme within Halton was undertaken by a number of external resources reporting to the Principal Business Development Officer within Halton Borough Council. The initial diagnostic phase with each business involved a structured set of questions and 1:1 interviews designed to identify strengths and weaknesses within the company. The results of the diagnostic phase assisted in producing a bespoke Action Plan for each company. This Action Plan was delivered to the Halton Borough Council Project Manager who then identified and assigned specialist assistance where this was appropriate.

3.5.2 Throughout the Merseyside Business Support Programme Halton worked closely with partners in other Local Authorities across the Merseyside City Region in order to ensure consistency of approach and to identify and implement good business support practise.

3.5.3 Although the Merseyside Business Support Programme is now complete ongoing contact is being maintained with assisted companies in order to identify and document the impact of the Merseyside Business Support Programme upon employment within Halton.

3.6 Merseyside Business Support Programme: Performance and Outputs

3.6.1 The programme received 287 enquiries concerning assistance under the programme. Of these, 120 businesses were assisted for => 12 hours to improve their performance. An additional 9 businesses were provided with < 12 hours assistance. 27 businesses enrolled on the programme but failed to complete the diagnostic and / or specialist support stage.

3.6.2 The following table details the performance of the Merseyside Business Support Programme within Halton. Although performance is lower than anticipated, Halton compares favourably with the Liverpool City Region as a whole. Performance is also within the thresholds required to draw down grant.

3.6.3

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>%</b>
Businesses Assisted	146	120	82%
Jobs Created	115	89	77%
Jobs Safeguarded	60	107	178%

Improved Business Profitability	94	14	15%
Expenditure	£381,852	£347,224	91%

#### 4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The Merseyside Business Support Programme has delivered tangible benefits to the local business community and in so doing contribute to the realisation of a number of the Council's key strategic objectives described in the Community Strategy.

4.2 Along with Regional Partners, Halton Borough Council has submitted a proposal for a follow-up programme to continue to offer business support across the Merseyside region. The Liverpool City Region Integrated Business Support Project (LCRIBS) is part of the "Priority Axis 3 Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs" Operational Programme. The total funding for the programme is £5,870,248 with £462,146 identified for business support within Halton.

#### 5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There were no direct funds paid to companies participating in the Merseyside Business Support Programme. Grant was paid to suppliers contracted to manage and deliver the diagnostic and specialist support phases of the programme.

5.2 Quarterly progress and financial reports were submitted to LCC. Conditional upon these reports being satisfactory LCC claimed the funding from DCLG. LCC then reimburse Halton Borough Council with 50% of monies spent in delivering the Merseyside Business Support Programme within Halton.

5.3 The total claim to the LCC for the implementation of the Merseyside Business Support Programme within Halton was £347,224. Of this total, Halton Borough Council will be reimbursed with £173,612 by LCC.

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

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

Improving business sustainability and performance will create more employment opportunities for the Borough's young people

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

Improving business sustainability and performance will create more employment opportunities for the people of the Borough

### 6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Creating sustainable employment will have a positive impact upon the health of the communities of Halton

### 6.4 **A Safer Halton**

Access to sustainable employment contributes positively to a range of issues associated with the broader areas of crime, disorder and safer communities

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

Increased business sustainability will drive the Borough's urban renewal

## 7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The Council entered into a contract with Liverpool City Council (LCC), the Accountable Body for the Programme, and, indirectly, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), with whom LCC have a contractual agreement to deliver the Merseyside Business Support Programme across the sub-region.

7.2 The Halton project team maintained a Risk and Issue Register. This was submitted to LCC on a quarterly basis. During the course of the project the Halton delivery of the Merseyside Business Support Programme was the subject of a number of LCC Audits. These Audits did not raise any substantial issues.

7.3 Halton was also required to contribute output files and procurement materials to the DCLG as part of an LCC Audit. LCC is awaiting the final responses from the DCLG. However, initial feedback from LCC indicates that there are no issues with the Halton submission.

## 8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

There are no equality and diversity issues.

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

None.