

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

DATE: 23 September 2019

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Enterprise, Communities
and Resources

PORTFOLIO: Economic Development

SUBJECT: Employment, Learning & Skills Update
Report

WARDS: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The Divisional Manager Employment, Learning & Skills will be in attendance at this meeting and will make a presentation to Members of the Board which will provide an overview of Employment, Learning & Skills activities in Halton.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

1) the report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The Employment, Learning & Skills Division sits within the wider Economy, Enterprise & Property Department and consists of the following services:

- Adult Community Learning
- Family Learning
- Halton Employment Partnership and Employability Programmes
- Halton People into Jobs, delivering on the following contracts:
 - DWP Work & Health Programme
 - DWP Households into Work
 - DWP/ESF Ways to Work
 - ESF/Big Lotto Digital Inclusion Project
- Liverpool City Region Apprenticeship Hub (managed on behalf of the Combined Authority)

3.2 For the last 5+ years, the services/contracts that the Division delivers have been 100% externally funded from 2 main funding agencies via Government departments: the Department for Work & Pensions and the Education & Skills Funding Agency. In addition, the Division has been successful in being awarded European Social Funds to deliver a number of projects, including Ways to Work.

- 3.3 The services that the Division offers to the community of Halton provide huge benefits to the borough, through upskilling local residents, assisting them in securing sustainable employment and ensuring local employers recruit local residents. In addition, the Division provides valuable services to families through its work in schools and Children's Centres under the 'family learning' banner.
- 3.4 A number of developments have taken place in the field of employment, learning and skills and it is timely to present Members with an update.

Devolution of the Adult Education Budget (AEB).

- 3.4.1 Over the last 12 months, the Division has been working closely with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (CA) towards devolution of the AEB. From 1st August 2019, management of the AEB £53m allocation now sits with the CA. The majority of this funding (£38m) was awarded via an AEB grant, with the remainder being competitively tendered for. Further Education Colleges and Local Authority Adult Learning Services are now in receipt of the grant allocations, whilst other training providers have been awarded contracts covering the City Region.
- 3.4.2 A Relationship Manager from the CA is in place for each AEB provider. In Halton, the Local Authority and Riverside College have the same Relationship Manager and she now attends the joint meetings that the Local Authority and Riverside College have been holding for the last 15 months in readiness for devolution of AEB.
- 3.4.3 The CA wanted to offer greater flexibility in terms of the use of AEB and asked colleges and councils to propose a number of 'Test & Learn' pilots around the 3 priority areas of: maths & English, ESOL and Digital. The funding for the Test & Learn pilots has come as an additional allocation to the previous years' AEB allocations straight from Government. The Employment, Learning & Skills Division has opted for 2 pilots. The first focuses on a Reading Volunteers programme. This pilot will train local volunteers to work with our learners who are non-readers, matching them up in pairs and helping learners improve their reading skills. Whilst previous funding would have enabled similar activity, 1:1 support is extremely costly and when deciding how best to spend AEB allocations previously, although this activity would have been valuable, it was deemed an inefficient use of resources. As additional funding has been made available via devolution, will provide Halton Council with an opportunity to test out this activity in a controlled and funded way.
- 3.4.4 The second Test & Learn pilot focuses on digital developments. The Division has offered a range of IT courses over the years, with the focus mainly on introductory courses utilising Microsoft Office and Internet packages. However, in the fast changing world of digitalisation, there was a clear gap in the curriculum that the service was keen to develop

and offer to learners. The pilot will cover 3 key areas: website design; marketing and digital advertising; and marketing with film. This is an exciting curriculum development for the service and one that fits with the Combined Authority's Skills for Growth priorities. The new courses will start week commencing 23 September 2019.

- 3.4.5 The Divisional Manager contacted all other providers who have been awarded AEB in the City Region and invited them to attend the Halton Employment Partnership meeting in July to introduce themselves and to gain insight into the planned AEB offer from Halton Council and Riverside College. These introductory meetings enabled providers to understand what gaps, if any, there are likely to be in Halton AEB delivery and agree next steps, given many of the providers have confirmed to the CA that they will be delivering in Halton. A joint event of all providers is being organised by the CA for some time in the autumn.
- 3.4.6 Funding returns will now be submitted to the CA, rather than directly to the Education & Skills Funding Agency. It is too early days to comment on AEB finance/performance processes undertaken by the CA as devolution only came into play on 1st August; however, we will keep Members updated accordingly.

Skills Capital

- 3.4.7 On 5th June 2019, the CA launched its Skills Capital Prospectus worth £18m. There are 5 investment strands available: sites and premises; improved facilities; equipment; maintenance of Further Education facilities; and Low Carbon Reinvestment. Council adult learning providers are only eligible for the first 3 investment strands. The closing date for applications was 31st August 2019.
- 3.4.8 The Employment, Learning & Skills Division has submitted bids in the Improved Facilities and Equipment strands, with a focus on Kingsway Learning Centre in Widnes and the digital agenda, in line with the Test & Learn pilot.

ESF calls

- 3.4.9 Over the last 3 years, the Division has benefited from the award of ESF funding. The ESF projects were submitted on behalf of the CA and involved local council delivery in each borough. There remains ESF funding for the City Region and a number of ESF calls have either been submitted or are due to be announced.
- 3.4.10 An extension to June 2021 for the 1.1. ESF investment strand for Ways to Work has been requested by the Combined Authority. This is currently being appraised. A number of other ESF calls that ended in May, June, July and August (including Graduate Placements, Supported Internships, Skills & Apprenticeships and Higher Level Leadership & Management) are yet to be appraised.

3.4.11 There will be an opportunity to bid for funding within the investment strand 1.4 Active Inclusion, but the level of funding available is not yet known.

3.4.12 A National Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) Call was published in July 2019. The Call is for the More Developed Region only, as this is the only Category of Region where YEI funding remains. It is envisaged that the ESF amount available nationally will be circa. £80m and the closing date for applications is 26th September. The only borough in the Liverpool City Region that is categorised as 'more developed' is Halton, so there is potentially a lot of funding that could be bid for. As with the other open calls, match funding is a requirement and discussions are underway as to where match funding could be sourced. The age range of beneficiaries will be 16-29 year olds. The DWP has also confirmed that £1m ESF will be included in this call for the Transitional areas of the Liverpool City Region. Discussions are underway with the 6 Local Authorities and the Combined Authority about a joint submission, which potentially could extend the 1.3 element of the Ways to Work project.

3.4.13 The CA is now seeking clarity around the proposed Shared Prosperity Fund for when ESF comes to an end.

Skills and Apprenticeship Hub

3.4.13 The Employment, Learning & Skills Division has managed the Liverpool City Region Apprenticeship Hub on behalf of the City Region for 5 years. However, given the developments at the CA and as part of the Metro Mayor's ambitions, a proposal is being made by the CA to seek external funds to transfer the Apprenticeship Hub to the CA and align this with the Skills for Growth service at the CA, under a new Skills and Apprenticeship Hub. £4m of Single Investment Fund (SIF) and £5.5m of ESF has been requested in order to fund this new service. The full business case for SIF has been submitted and ESF will be appraised once an appraiser is appointed.

If this proposal were to be agreed, this would see the new CA service in place by 1st November 2019. However, at the time of writing, there has not been any political agreement to these proposals. Halton's position is that it would wish to see the Apprenticeship Hub element of the service being hosted and managed in Halton, as per the current arrangements.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Employment, Learning & Skills is one of Halton Borough Council's key strategic priorities. The Division operates within a climate of constant external audit and inspection (for example, DWP, Ofsted, Matrix.) and is therefore, able to demonstrate its quality and effectiveness in all it does.

- 4.2 Formal devolution of the AEB was implemented on 1st August 2019. Systems and processes are still being rolled out from the CA and Members will be updated on progress. Use of AEB and Skills Capital funding must demonstrate alignment with the City Region's Skills Strategy, Apprenticeship Growth Plan and Skills for Growth Action Plans and members of the Division are integral to working groups leading on these areas of work at the CA.
- 4.2 A number of other key policies are embedded in the work of the Division including supporting people on Universal Credit to gain employment, ensuring adults achieve level 2 qualifications and that employability provision meets the needs of employers. Helping employers understand the Apprenticeship Levy is a key role for the Apprenticeship Hub Team as is ensuring local authorities utilise their levy by creating apprenticeship opportunities.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Employment, Learning & Skills Division is externally funded. Funding is used to cover all accommodation, staffing and resource costs as well as funding specific initiatives, for example, paid work placements for local unemployed people called Intermediate Labour Market placements, as well as funding of bus passes, exam costs and interview clothes. All external expenditure is subject to financial clawback should achievements not be reached.
- 5.2 It is, therefore, imperative that the Division seeks out any other external funding opportunities available to ensure sustainability of the service.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

The Ways to Work contract and the LCR Apprenticeship Hub have clear links to the Council's 14-19 Team, including a dedicated mentoring scheme and school engagement.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

The Employment, Learning & Skills Division has demonstrated a broad ranging and significant achievements over a number of years. The knock on effects of supporting people with upskilling and gaining employment have a very positive outcome for the local economy. All individuals accessing the services are sensitively dealt with as many present themselves with a whole host of underlying issues. To be working with individuals that have experienced many barriers in life and then to help them to gain new skills, qualifications and employment is testament to the commitment of the Employment, Learning & Skills staff and their excellent use of different external contracts in supporting local residents and the Halton economy.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

A number of the contracts that are delivered through the Division are specifically targeted at residents with health conditions. In addition to this, the Adult Learning Service enrolments show that over the last 3 academic years nearly half of them declare a disability and/or learning difficulty. Helping individuals to overcome health conditions and work towards more positive outcomes is integral to the work of the Division. Opportunities to introduce the Test & Learn pilots and to secure Skills Capital funding will enable the service to provide inclusive growth for our residents.

6.4 A Safer Halton

None.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

None at present.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

The service is open and accessible to all Halton residents

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

None under the meaning of the Act.