

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

**DATE:** 28 July 2020

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director – Enterprise, Community  
and Resources

**PORTFOLIO:** Economic Development; Community and  
Sport

**SUBJECT:** Covid19 – New Working Arrangements

**WARDS:** Borough wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The impact of the Coronavirus is being felt in our communities in many different ways, and will be personal to each individual, couple or family or indeed, Halton business. This report sets out the range of services that have been provided during the COVID 19 Pandemic which are relevant to the Employment Learning and Skills and Community Policy and Performance Board.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That**

- 1) **the report be noted; and**
- 2) **The Board considers the information presented and raise any questions of interest or points of clarification following the presentation.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **3.1 Business Support Update**

During Lockdown, The Business Improvement and Growth Team continued to collate all current government advice to businesses into a single resource for use by Council colleagues and develop dedicated resource packs for specific target groups, for example the self-employed.

The Business Improvement and Growth Team has a dedicated phone number 0151 511 7825 and email [business@halton.gov.uk](mailto:business@halton.gov.uk) These were used as the primary points of contact for local businesses seeking support and information. The Team sign posts businesses to the government's advice website at [www.businesssupport.gov.uk](http://www.businesssupport.gov.uk) and the

Growth Platform web site <https://growthplatform.org/business-covid-19-advice/>

Referrals can be made to a City Region helpline staffed by private sector business professionals who are providing their services free of charge to businesses in distress.

### **Awareness Raising**

The Business Improvement & Growth Team sends a weekly e-shot to 2,500 local businesses containing up to date information about business support during the current crisis. Topics have ranged from how to apply for a business ratepayer's grant, Local Authority Discretionary Grant Fund, highlighting professional support to SMEs (defined as businesses with between £1m and 45m turnover). The newsletters also raises awareness of business opportunities so, for example, the LCR had an opportunity for business to provide of PPE and warn of current scams targeting businesses.

### **Call Handling**

The Team has managed more than a thousand calls from local businesses in distress, with a large proportion of enquiries concerned about eligibility for support through the Business Rates system or other government backed schemes.

Calls handled also included more specific and technical enquiries dictated by the type, category or class of business and/or the individual circumstances of the owner or manager. These are very complex in nature.

This service was particularly important when the business rates grant scheme was announced when we were able to support colleagues in finance with the call volume coming into the Council from businesses specifically about that scheme.

The team has provided very detailed support and guidance to individual companies. This has only been possible through the prompt and invaluable support of Business Rates colleagues.

Some calls have been technical in nature however, it should be noted that colleagues have provided a quasi-counselling service to individuals in distress, ensuring they are pointed in the right direction. For example, when it is clear that a business is not eligible for business support they have been signposted to appropriate and eligible benefits. This is an intangible output from the work but cannot be overstated.

### **Grants**

In addition to the call handling service mentioned above the team has designed, administered and is delivering the Local Authority

Discretionary Grants Fund. The scheme is targeted at businesses that were not able to access previous grant schemes but had property costs and had been significantly impacted by Covid-19. Government's criteria is:

- A business must be a solvent business that was trading on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020;
- Should be a small or micro company;
- Have ongoing property costs;
- Has been significantly financially affected by Covid-19;
- Has not received other relevant grant support from Central Government apart from the Furlough Scheme;

Halton's scheme's eligibility is focused on the following themes:

1. Shared Space Grant
2. Charitable Sector Support Grant
3. Bed & Breakfast Support Grant
4. Businesses either working from home and/or other locally owned businesses in other premises

The scheme is initially being delivered between 1<sup>st</sup> June and 19<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

### **3.2 Employment Learning and Skills Update**

The services delivered within the Employment, Learning & Skills Division are funded externally via a combination of grant and competitively tendered for submissions. The majority of the funding received is obtained through a 'payment by results' approach.

Therefore, the more outcomes achieved, the greater the income: levels (outcomes are e.g. adult learning enrolments; customers on HPIJ programmes; skills shows delivered by the Apprenticeship Support Team).

The onset of lockdown because of COVID 19 health and safety measures required the operations of the Division to be quickly re-evaluated and re-modelled to enable continued support for our learners and customers.

Some staff members were already equipped to work from home. However, many of the team did not have the facilities in place and managers worked closely with ICT Services in putting relevant software and hardware in place to enable home working. Within a few days of lockdown, ICT Services successfully got all staff online and able to work remotely, which was very much appreciated.

The COVID 19 situation has resulted in the following within the Employment, Learning & Skills Division:

- Cessation of face-to-face delivery of teaching, learning and assessment following the closure of centres and lockdown measures.
- Cessation of face to face employment support via Halton People into Jobs
- Awarding Body requirements for some qualifications, in particular for Childcare qualifications, will result in learners having to continue learning in 2020/21 in order to achieve the minimum placement hours and assessment of the qualification criteria.
- Adult learning exams are unable to go ahead in centres
- Learner portfolios are only partially completed
- The majority of the summer term adult learning classes unable to run
- Customers and learners unable to attend centres to access IT to job search, and self-study.

The Division has quickly had to remodel its operations to ensure continued support for its customers and learners. Tutors, advisors and apprenticeship support staff have continued contact with residents through telephone, Skype and other virtual platforms such as Zoom and Teams . For adult learners who were nearing completion of qualifications, guidance from awarding bodies, which has been received, will allow for tutor and course work assessment; including taking into account the results of mock exams. This has involved learner portfolios being 'dropped-off' at centres and then picked up by tutors. We have adhered to the Government and Public Health guidance for this to happen.

Halton Borough Council is progressing the roll out of Microsoft Teams, which will provide staff with an online video platform to communicate with others and share documents, etc. Adult learning tutors have used some of the time during lockdown to develop an online offer of courses, which will be rolled out. This will enable adult learning courses to be delivered remotely, where necessary. Teams software will also be a useful tool for the Apprenticeship Team to offer information to groups of school students without the need to attend the venue.

Remote marketing and promotion of the Division's services will continue. However, this may be less effective and result in a reduction in participation. In addition, an unknown factor may be a lack of learner/customer confidence to commit to programmes whilst social distancing/phased lockdown remains in place.

Social Distancing and virtual join – learners and customers who are vulnerable and have no access to IT will be invited to attend sessions in the learning centres, maintaining social distancing, with other learners/customers accessing through digital methods. Access to digital equipment and internet is a barrier for many learners/customers and this will present the Division with a challenge as we try to support the most vulnerable in our community.

It is not clear at this time how schools in Halton will operate resulting in uncertainty about availability of childcare learner placements in 2020/21. We will continue to monitor this element of the course and will adjust the delivery model as required. Delivery of learning programmes in Children's Centres will be dependent on centres opening and the availability of crèche provision. A blended approach of face-to-face, digital and remote learning will be used to maximise access to learning for parents.

Close partnership working with a range of organisations in Halton will ensure employability programmes meet the needs of local employers, e.g. Job Centres, Halton People into Jobs, Housing Associations, Children's Centres, and National Careers Service.

In summary, at a local level our immediate actions are to safely re-open our centres and prioritise access for those residents that need our support the most, particularly those who do not have a social network and access to personal IT. Supporting the many newly unemployed residents as well as the existing cohort of unemployed residents will be a real priority at a local level.

### **Library Services**

- Digital services (eBooks, eaudio, press reader) continue to be popular
- Contactless services ( Home Library Service, Choose & Collect, Book Drop) working well
- Draft sector toolkit is being prepared and Halton's emerging plan is consistent and is aligned with this through, for example, attendance at webinars & peer meetings.
- As well as learning from European colleagues who are ahead of the UK's timeline we are now looking closer to home as library buildings in the Channel Islands and Isle of Man are now open, and to Westminster Libraries which remained open throughout lockdown period.
- Number of staff in libraries working on contactless offers, redeployed staff requested back for the proposed July opening date.

#### **Covid effect on service:**

- Library buildings closed
- Majority of staff redeployed
- Services moved online – additional investment had to be found for eBooks
- Events cancelled
- Move to digital only activities – disenfranchising digitally excluded communities
- Loss of income – room hire, tickets, café
- Library staff delivering books to Home Library Service customers / shielded residents
- Key book supplier has gone out of business

## **Sports and Recreation**

**Leisure Centres:** Kingsway Leisure Centre, Brookvale Recreation Centre and Runcorn Swimming Pool closed to the public 19<sup>th</sup> March. The majority of staff have not worked since 23<sup>rd</sup> March. The service is generating no income. The service anticipates a significant increase in cleaning and training costs to re-open. The centres will have to introduce a full activity booking system (no turn-ups) and capacity will be reduced. Industry surveys suggests 70 – 80% of gym members will return within a couple of week of reopening if confidence in the delivery model. Participation numbers not expected to return to pre COVID levels for a significant period. This will have a major impact on income, thus the subsidy required will increase significantly.

The service has reviewed the Ukactive, Swim England, Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) and Swimming Teacher Association (STA) reopening guidance. Draft risk assessment and building control documents produced. The extent to what activities the sites will propose opening and the opening hours will be determined following further staff discussions (occupation and environmental risk assessments, extensive training and availability). Government guidance and discussions with other colleagues, regarding reception screens, hand sanitisers, cleaning, barriers, PPE, will also contribute towards opening and operational plans. A phased opening is proposed, starting with Brookvale, followed by Kingsway. However, no dates have been confirmed.

## **Community Activity:**

- Double page in Halton magazine to support people stay active at home, 35,800 delivered
- Staying Active webpage set-up end of March, 600 views first day, updated with information for older adults  
<https://activehalton.co.uk/staying-active-at-home-during-covid-19/>
- Access to 100's of online classes and advise provided on the active Halton webpage
- Promoting Stay Active at home webpage: 3000 Facebook views first day (sport dev and walking for health Facebook)
- Facebook reach 28 day period (ending 6 April) over 5000 reached & 600 engagements (sport dev and walking for health Facebook)
- 20K twitter impressions (sport dev twitter 7.1K & Active Me twitter 13.1K)
- 30 Freelance exercise coaches supported (governing body advice and promotions)
- 12 Volunteer health Walk leaders supported, including wellbeing calls

- Mental Health awareness training offered to all volunteers
- National Walking Month May – social media campaign delivered
- National Mental Health week – social media campaign delivered
- National Volunteer week – social media campaign delivered
- A4 sheet of Falls Prevention exercises reached over 3300 on twitter end April
- 120 working partners and 500 public emails receive regular updates, sharing of information to support public stay well and stay active at home
- Continuous National Social media campaign engagement including Sport England #StayInWorkOut #WeAreUndefeatable
- Over 40 Community classes now available on zoom (community freelance coaches)
- Public Health England booklet to support older adults stay active at home and avoid falls, disseminated, reaching over 600 emails, 1869 impressions on Active Me twitter
- Support health improvement team disseminate 5000 printed copies of Public Health Booklet
- 20 applications submitted from Halton to Sport England Emergency Fund: 20 assessed and 12 approved. Grants total £41,473 average of £3,456 per application. Further grant info <https://www.merseysidesport.com/covid-19-sector-support/> will
- 2 virtual Couch to 2k programmes delivered
- 2 family activity sheets produced and sent to a variety of settings to the community
- May half term activity leaflet put on social media for children to complete
- Family Games posted
- Updates given to clubs in Halton Sports Partnership network, funding opportunities, advice on virtual sessions and how to come back from lockdown
- Different intensity activity levels so something for the whole community, (yoga, gentle circuits, HIIT, LBT, abs& stretch, box fit, activities to keep children active)
- Regular posts promoting healthy eating tips, motivational and inspiring quotes

- Playing Pitch Strategy Winter Assessment has been completed, Summer Assessment has been delayed due to COVID-19 anticipated end June, earliest draft now Aug 20. This will delay production of the strategy.
- New Leisure Centre, Moor Lane, planning application submitted
- Refurbishment of Brookvale All Weather Pitch project progressing with the Football Foundation

### **Brindley Update**

- The Brindley Theatre has remained staffed throughout lockdown with staff working on site with full social distancing measures in place. Essential programmed maintenance contractors also had full access to the building as required.
- Brindley Theatre staff are working on reorganising and negotiating contracts thus maintaining a full programme once reopening takes place.
- The Box Office are administering refunds (£57,000 to date), maintaining the 24/7 online service (as some transactions are still taking place via online and telephone), and updating and maintaining the data protection information on the customer database.
- Online Gift Voucher sales are also being explored and set up with our contracted sales ticketing system to increase future income generation. This is a comprehensive process using external software.
- During lockdown up to August, over 180 shows have been cancelled or rearranged (primarily rearranged) with no contractual cancellation costs to the council due to individual negotiations with promoters.
- From lockdown up to August, the Brindley Theatre has lost an estimated £460,000 in income (based on income taken in 2019/20).
- The bookings diary has over 90% occupancy through until early 2022 with enquires being received daily.
- A member of the technical team is carrying out thorough checks of all the comprehensive sound and lighting equipment. This is to ensure lack of use does not result in failure/costly repairs, as many of these items have never been left unused for more than 3 days in 16 years.
- One staff member remains on deployment to the Open Spaces Team at Picow Farm Road with other staff only working up to their contracted hours at the Brindley Theatre.
- Staff are also maintaining weekly fire, water testing and health and safety equipment checks.

- The one-year Theatre Seat Concession trial was due to finish on 31 July this year. Due to the building being locked down this will be extended for the period closed in order to complete the trial. This revised finish date will be confirmed when the building is due to reopen.

### **Events Update**

- The Runcorn Hill Summer Fair was cancelled (operated at nil cost).
- All Funfair and Circus bookings were cancelled resulting in lost income.
- The 2020 North West Vintage Rally has been cancelled (operated at nil cost).
- The Borough of Culture Firework Display 2021 contract will need to be negotiated and possibly revised with Legal and Procurement.
- Community Events Volunteering within Parks has ceased.
- The Councils Events calendar including community and private applications have been cancelled for 2020.

### **Community Centres Update**

In terms of the Community Centres, we closed all of our centres to the public from 5pm on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March, with staff continuing to attend to carry out deep cleans of the buildings until Monday 30<sup>th</sup> March, when the buildings were closed indefinitely.

From 30<sup>th</sup> March all supervisors and administrative staff, were set up to work from home and continued to carry out administrative functions relating to the service.

Since the beginning of April a number of staff from the service have taken up redeployment opportunities, as follows:

7 members of staff making calls to the 'shielded individuals'  
 5 members of staff volunteering to support Adult Social Care  
 2 members of staff supporting Open Space Services

The supervisors for each of the buildings have been visiting the buildings at least twice each week to carry out building checks, testing of the fire alarm and panic alarm systems, in addition to providing access for any planned maintenance arranged by property services.

In more recent weeks, since the UK government released plans to lift the lock down, much focus has been on how we might be able reopen the buildings safely.

By the end of week commencing 29<sup>th</sup> June – Property Services colleagues will have been out to all of the centres with each of the centre supervisors and community centres manager to support with the completion of the necessary risk assessments and the return to work management checklist. Any remedial actions will be passed to the appropriate contractors, signage will be ordered and all risk assessments can be reviewed and/or completed.

Options for reopening consist of either a phased opening of x number of community centres or the reopening of all community centres. It is not yet known when Community Centres will reopen to the public.

## **5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The policy implications of the review relate primarily to the Employment Learning and Skills, etc. etc. priority however, this is a cross cutting work area, which has wider implications on other areas of council business.

## **6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 None

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

### **7.1 Children and Young People in Halton**

**None**

### **7.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**

The report refers to a number of services that have continued during lock down.

### **7.3 A Healthy Halton**

**None**

### **7.4 A Safer Halton**

**None**

### **7.5 Halton's Urban Renewal**

**None**

## **8.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

**None**

**9.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

**None**

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

10.1 There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act.