

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

DATE: 20 June 2022

REPORTING OFFICER: Operational Director Economy, Enterprise & Property

PORTFOLIO: Employment, Learning & Skills & Community

SUBJECT: Update on Employment, Learning, Skills and Community Policy and Performance Board Scrutiny Topics

1.0 PURPOSE AND CONTENT OF REPORT

1.1 To provide an update on the Scrutiny Topic Group themes agreed by Members for the Municipal Year 2021/22.

1.2 To consider proposed next steps for the completion of this work.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That the Board

2.1 Notes the content of the report.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Members considered a number of suggestions for this year's Scrutiny Topic Group's area of focus.

Members confirmed that they would like to progress two topics i) 'Health and Employment' and ii) 'The Provision of Business Support in the Borough'.

The Terms of Reference for the Topic Groups were presented at the June and September PPBs.

Given resource constraints, Members agreed that the priority would be Health and Employment and Topic Item ii) would be progressed later in the Municipal Year and would also link to future study visits.

Nevertheless, both Topic Groups have met and a summary of the key points is set out below:

3.2 i) Health and Employment

The Health and Employment topic group sessions to date have included contributions from officers within the Employment, Learning and Skills (ELS) Division, as well as Public Health.

It was noted that there are excellent relationships between the ELS Division and Health services who contribute to improving the mental health of adults who live and or work in Halton. Services work collaboratively to raise

awareness in the work force and in communities to the support available. Health issues are an important component of the support local residents receive from the Council's Halton People into Jobs Team with employment programmes signposting to MIND as well as health trainer links.

The Adult Learning team within the ELS division has signed up to a mental health pledge, although it is worth noting that no dedicated learner support exists.

Emerging Issues

A key priority had been to develop and implement the 'Time to Change' Employer Pledge. For a variety of understandable reasons, employers have been less receptive to engaging in this type of work, due to COVID restrictions, as well as workforce capacity issues. In fact, many employers have been focused on saving their businesses and have had to make difficult choices.

Future Actions/Next Steps

There is potential scope to work with the Halton Employment Partnership to reinvigorate this work. Furthermore, arising from discussions with the Chamber, as part of the Business Support Topic Group, there is an opportunity to raise awareness through the Business Improvement Districts Management Boards and the Chamber's own First Tuesday Breakfast meetings.

Members have asked for further consideration to be given to whether the pandemic has informed or influenced future service design and delivery.

ii) The Provision of Business Support in the Borough

To date, three sessions comprising 1) an introduction to the Topic Group (Background and Context) 2) a presentation from the Council's Inward Investment officer, who provided Case Study examples demonstrating where business support has been effective. 3) The Chief Executive of the Chamber of Commerce also provided a helpful presentation which outlined how the Chamber supports business in the borough

Emerging Issues

Overall business support was fragmented and the system seemed to encourage providers to 'sell their service'.

Business support programmes were often short-term and needed to be more intense

The national enterprise strategy was still being developed and so the future direction of business support in England was unclear

Export certification – Brexit some businesses have moved out of the borough and some of this work had been taken on through European Chambers.

Customs Declarations & Export Documentation a new service which is a unique system businesses get real time info on where their goods are.

Peer networks – government contract businesses come together and learn together and tap into expertise of fellow business people.

Halton's Business Improvement Districts a good way of bringing together businesses for common aims – the concept could be expanded

Brexit had raised a number of issues e.g. stress on individuals and business leaders; transition no firm answers. Peer networks were valuable. End of furlough. Some businesses downsized from outset, some have held on.

There were questions relating to business support during the pandemic. Businesses don't have historic data as pandemic hasn't happened before. Productivity is down – divide within workforce retraining etc. and rebuild culture. Business leaders under pressure given full on key decisions having to be made. Business owners need help.

Retail as a sector gets overlooked.

No start up support. No enterprise hub were weaknesses for the borough.

No capital grant scheme for Halton was also raised as a concern.

The Council's Business Support Team comprises x FTE, so is relatively modest in size.

Further actions:

To invite contributions from the Growth Platform
To facilitate a Study Visit to a local business

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Supporting Phase 3 of the Business Growth Programme will align with the Council's priorities in improving the economic growth. The programme will do this by aiding SMEs within the Halton area to grow, develop, become more sustainable and increase jobs.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no financial implications identified in this report.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 **Children and Young People in Halton**

6.2 **Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**

The topic groups were established to support service development in this key priority area

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Access to sustainable employment will impact positively upon the health of the Borough.

6.4 A Safer Halton

No implications

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

No implications

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

There are no risks associated with this report.

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 under the meaning of the Act.