

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

**DATE:** 21<sup>st</sup> November 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 the proposed next steps for the completion of this work.
- 1.3 That the work of the Health and Employment Topic Group is concluded.
- 1.4 That the Business Support Topic Group is completed in January 2023.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDED:**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the ELS & C PPB agrees to the next steps outlined in the report.

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 3.1 Members have progressed two topics i) 'Health and Employment' and ii) 'The Provision of Business Support in the Borough'.

At the last PPB in June, Members were provided with a brief update as follows:

### **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.

Members were advised that 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.

It is proposed that the Halton Employment Partnership be commissioned 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.

### **Future Actions/Next Steps**

It is important to note that since the PPB commenced its Health and Employment Topic Group a new One Halton Health and Wellbeing Strategy for 2022-2027 has been launched (October 22). The strategy emphasises the important role of employment in helping people to live healthier and happier lives. The strategy also recognises that the health and care workforce in Halton needs to grow and develop to meet future challenges.

The strategy refers to the theme of *Tackling the Wider Determinants of health* and identifies actions that the partnership will take to reduce inequalities including:

*“Encourage local businesses to sign up to healthy workplace standards charter for public and private sectors.*

*Adopting procurement policies that support local investment and employment”.*

The document also outlines further commitments i.e.

### **What will we do in 2 years?**

*Work as part of Liverpool City Region to implement adoption of healthy workplace standards charter across all our large employers.  
Provide guidance to workplaces to recruit and retain people with a disability or long-term condition.*

*Developing the health and social care workforce to ensure they have the knowledge, skills and understanding about how to identify and respond to need and inequalities, signposting and referring appropriately.*

### **What will we do over the next 5 years?**

*Work with partners and the public to develop a local health and care recruitment offer.*

*Promote healthy workplaces by offering physical and mental health workplace offer to local businesses.*

*Target funding for help with financial support, adult education and link to job market demands to the wards with lower uptake.*

*Offer reskilling or new skills training and support to older unemployed adults.*

### **What difference will this make?**

*A more financially active and enabled community who are employed in good jobs that provide greater financial stability, improves quality of life and provide better health outcomes.*

A delivery plan to accompany the Health and Wellbeing strategy is being prepared.

Therefore, it is proposed that this Topic Group is concluded, but with the caveat that the PPB would welcome a presentation from health partners as the delivery plan emerges. Furthermore, the PPB would also wish to receive regular updates via the Quarterly Monitoring Reports on progress being made against targets outlined in the delivery and action plan that relate to Employment and Skills priorities.

### **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 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.

### **Future Actions and Next Steps**

There were two outstanding actions:

1. to receive a presentation from the Liverpool City Region Growth Platform. Members will note that a presentation is being provided by the Managing Director of the Growth Platform at this meeting.
2. To undertake a study visit to a local business to understand how business support has had a positive impact in the borough. It is proposed that a visit would be organised before the end of this calendar year.

A final report would be presented to the PPB in January which would capture the key points arising from the Growth Platform presentation, and the Study Visit.

## **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 There are no further policy implications

## **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**

No implications

## **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's residents.

## **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.'