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EMPLOYMENT, LEARNING AND SKILLS, AND COMMUNITY POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Employment, Learning and Skills, and Community Policy and Performance Board on Monday, 30 January 2023 in the Boardroom - Municipal Building, Widnes

Present: Councillors Jones (Chair), E. Cargill (Vice-Chair), Begg, Dourley, Garner, Logan, Rowe, Stretch and Skinner

Apologies for Absence: Councillor S. Hill and C. Plumpton Walsh

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: W. Rourke, A. Jones, S. Bartlett, L. Carr and S. Lowrie

Also in attendance: R. Owen – Halton Chamber of Commerce

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

	<i>Action</i>
ELS18 MINUTES	
The Minutes from the meeting held on 21 November 2023 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.	
ELS19 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME	
It was confirmed that no public questions had been received.	
ELS20 UPDATE ON EMPLOYMENT, LEARNING AND SKILLS, AND COMMUNITY POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD - BUSINESS SUPPORT SCRUTINY TOPICS	
The Board received a report from the Operational Director – Economy, Enterprise and Property, which gave an update on the 'Provision of Business Support' Scrutiny Topic Group.	
Further to the last meeting's update, this report provided commentary on the emerging issues and key considerations relating to the LCR Growth Platform following a presentation to the Board from its Managing Director; and the emerging issues following a study visit by the scrutiny	

group to *Carpenter Additive*, on Dennis Road, Widnes.

Members welcomed the update and agreed that the Topic Group be concluded.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) notes and received the update on the Topic Group; and
- 2) agrees that the Provision of Business Support Topic Group is now concluded.

ELS21 SPORT AND RECREATION TEAM

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director for Community and Greenspace, on the Council's Sport and Recreation Service.

It was reported that the Sport and Recreation Team has two distinct areas – Sports Development Team and the Leisure Centre Team. The report included information on the service delivery for both Teams from June 2022 to December 2022. It was noted that service delivery had been extremely difficult as recruitment delays affected staff, regular customers and engagement with residents. Further, the cost of living crisis was now affecting the service as some people were cutting back on how much they spent on leisure.

An update on the building programme of the new Leisure Centre on Moor Lane, Widnes, was also given; a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) had been prepared and were appended to the report for information. It was reported that the Contractor, *Wates*, was having meaningful dialogue with the Council, such as attending HEP meetings and visiting colleges, and were committed to a strong and comprehensive programme of social value activities in Halton. The Contractor would also be providing the Council with a monthly report on social value.

The following information was provided following Members' questions on the Service:

- The staffing structure of the Leisure Centres was explained – one Leisure Centre Manager manages the two Leisure Centres and directs two Senior Operations Managers (one assigned to each site). They ensured that service standards and operational standards were achieved and also managed six

Operation Managers, who took care of the day to day operations of the buildings and staff;

- All Operation Managers' posts were filled with internal promotions;
- The pay rates for Leisure Attendants were comparable with other providers;
- Recruitment for Leisure Attendants was ongoing – the majority recruited in November 2022 have started after a long process, with the main delay being pre-employment identity checks for those under 18;
- The Council has recognised this as an issue and offers support in obtaining identification where possible for young people;
- Three part time Leisure Attendant vacant posts would be advertised in February;
- The Swim Team was carrying a number of vacancies including the Manager's post – as a result the swimming lessons waiting list remains suspended;
- Free places for swim qualifications were currently being advertised – it was hoped that workforce plans being taken forward will lead to appointments and the learn to swim programme can be expanded;
- Swimming Instructor pay rates were lower than private providers, however, there were benefits the Council offered not matched by private employers such as pension, sick pay and training;
- Shortages of staff within the leisure business was a regional problem, being experienced by neighbouring authorities; and
- Some courses were being funded by donations from Police and social landlords.

RESOLVED: That the report and comments made be noted.

ELS22 LIVERPOOL CITY REGION LOCAL IMPROVEMENT SKILLS PLAN

The Board received a report of the Operational Director – Economy, Enterprise and Property, which provided an update on the development of a Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for the Liverpool City Region (LCR). Members welcomed Rachel Owen, from the Halton Chamber of Commerce, who delivered an accompanying presentation.

It was reported that the White Paper *The Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth* introduced a plan to put employers more firmly at the heart of the skills system to help ensure businesses and people

had the skills they needed to thrive and progress. The LSIPs were a key part of achieving this aim.

The LSIP was led by a designated Employer Representative Body (ERB); St Helen's Chamber of Commerce was designated for the LCR and would liaise with the other Chambers within the LCR. The LSIPs would set out employers' skills needs and the priority changes required in a local area to help ensure post-16 technical education and skills provision was more responsive and flexible in meeting local labour market skills needs. The report and presentation set out how this would be done and provided some guidance in respect of the LSIPs.

In response to Members questions and comments the following information was provided:

- TUC involvement was being done at a national level with DWP. St Helen's Chamber was the ERB for Halton as part of the LCR, so they could be contacted for more information about this;
- The responses to the questionnaire from Halton businesses was welcomed – there was no particular profile of companies that had responded so far; they were a mix of large, medium and small enterprises;
- Members were invited to provide details of companies in Halton they were aware of to the Chamber, for them to make contact with them;
- Although the top three sectors identified in Halton with skills gaps were manufacturing, construction, and logistics and warehousing, there was scope to include the environmental sector, for example companies such as Innovyn and Alstom (who had responded to the research);
- Construction was a very large area so a broad view of this was being taken, to include as many companies and trades as possible;
- Apprenticeships were included in the plan and focus groups would identify the skills gaps within apprenticeships as well;
- Focus groups would also identify the needs of the Borough as a whole;
- The ERB for the area was appointed by the Department for Education, after a tender process had taken place;
- Halton Chamber was working with the Colleges in Halton to identify gaps in skills provision, which was fed to Government. Any funding as a result of this went directly to the College (or other provider of education); and

- It was noted that additional specialist teachers / lecturers would also be needed to plug the gaps identified by the research and to deliver the education.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) Members note the process and progress being made to develop a Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for the Liverpool City Region; and
- 2) the Council works with Halton Chamber of Commerce to raise awareness of the Research Questionnaire contained in Appendix one of the report; additionally the Chamber maximises existing strategies and research held by the Council's Business Support Team.

ELS23 DEPARTMENT OF WORK AND PENSIONS RESTART CONTRACT UPDATE

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director – Economy, Enterprise and Property, which provided an overview of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Restart Programme contract, currently being delivered by Halton People into Jobs (HPIJ).

It was reported that in June 2021 Halton Borough Council entered into a subcontracting arrangement with Prime Contractor (G4S) who had been tasked with delivering the DWP's new Restart Programme.

The programme is mandatory for individuals that had been unemployed and in receipt of benefits for 9 months or more. It was noted that indicative start profiles estimated that 1992 Halton residents would be supported through the programme. The programme offered 'Payment by Results' which were received on achievement of sustained job outcomes; the definition of this was explained.

The report outlined for Members the performance and achievements of the programme from June 2021 to December 2022 and listed the Customer Service Standards (CSS) that were also used to measure job starts and sustained job outcomes.

Following the presentation of the update, the following additional information was noted after questions:

- There have been two recruitment freezes by HBC

which has affected the performance of the Team, leading to financial penalties for not being fully staffed. The Team was put on a Performance Improvement Plan by G4S due to this shortage of staff, resulting in underperformance – concerns were raised over the future of the contract if this was not resolved;

- DWP referrals were lower lately which has been a national issue as well as a local issue;
- Some clients referred did refuse to enter the Programme for various reasons which presented challenges for the Team;
- Clients also received training where necessary and help towards public transport costs; and
- Some clients entering the Programme had succeeded in gaining maths, English and IT qualifications, as well as some specific job qualifications.

The Board welcomed the report and praised the HPIJ Team on their successes with the Restart Programme.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

In order to complete the presentation of the following item, a motion to move Standing Order number 50 was made, seconded and agreed by the Board.

ELS24 SUPPORTED INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME (WORK-BASED STUDY PROGRAMME)

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director – Economy, Enterprise and Property, which provided an overview of the Supported Internship (SI) Programme contract currently being delivered by Halton Borough Council's (HBC) Employment Learning and Skills Division (delivered jointly by Halton People into Jobs and Halton Adult Learning).

It was reported that in April 2021 HBC were commissioned to deliver the SI Programme which was a structured, work based study programme for young people aged 16-24 with Special Educational Needs/Disabilities (SEND) and who had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The programme was initially contracted to deliver 10 Supported Internships in year one.

The report provided details of the SI Programme, which included its aims, its four key principles, how the Programme was delivered and achievements to date.

The role of the 'Job Coach' was explained to Members as being someone responsible for working with the Interns to identify suitable placements for them to complete. They continued to support them during the placement until the Intern and the employer were satisfied that they could undertake the role independently. The role of the Job Coach also included educating the employer, for example with the needs of the Intern and health and safety matters. Travel training was also carried out by the Job Coach to help the Intern to get to their education setting and/or employers premises. This was carried out until the Intern and their family/carer was satisfied that they could undertake their travel safely and independently.

The Board discussed the issues faced by the Programme from the recruitment prioritisation process in place since the Programme went live in September 2021. This has prevented recruitment of sufficiently qualified and experienced front line staff in the Employment, Learning and Skills Division; to deliver the Programme within the required timescales is seen as a lower corporate priority. Temporary agency staff had been used where possible, but there has still been an impact on Interns being able to receive the full Programme offer this year. Members felt that this was an important service area and where possible, recruitment to posts should be accelerated.

To update, since the publication of the report, it was announced that the total number of supported internships now moved into paid work was six, an increase of two (paragraph 3.2.2) and some now worked for the Council. It was noted that feedback on the Programme received from the Interns and their families so far was positive.

The Board thanked both Teams for their work in delivering the Supported Internship Programme so far.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Meeting ended at 9.07 p.m.