

# ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EMPLOYMENT, LEARNING & SKILLS AND COMMUNITY POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD JUNE 2023 – MARCH 2024

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## Introduction from Councillor Eddie Jones Chair of the Employment, Learning & Skills and Community Policy and Performance Board

The Board scrutinises the work of the *Economy, Enterprise and Property Department* and the *Community and Environment Department*.

My thanks to the officers for working with the Vice-Chair and I to develop the agenda items and thank you for the quality of the reports and presentations they have produced during the year. We have certainly had a varied and informative agenda and I believe that Members of this Board continue to proactively shape the services we provide to our residents and I would like to thank Members of the Board for their passion and commitment.

I hope that the Board will continue to make a worthwhile contribution to creating an economically prosperous Borough in this challenging environment.

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## THE BOARD'S MEMBERSHIP

During 2023/24, the Board's membership comprised Councillor Eddie Jones (Chair); Councillor Aimee Teeling (Vice-Chair); Councillor Angela Ball; Councillor Emma Garner; Councillor Stan Hill; Councillor Noel Hutchinson; Councillor Mike Ryan; Councillor Carol Plumpton Walsh; Councillor Chris Rowe; Councillor Tom Stretch; and Councillor Andrea Wall

The Board had 4 meetings during the year in June 2023, September 2023, November 2023 and January 2024.

## THE ROLE OF THE BOARD

The Council's constitution sets out the Board's strategic priority is to develop policy and scrutinise performance in relation to the Council's objectives. Specifically in relation to 4 areas:

- Enterprise and employment
- Adult learning and skills
- Culture and leisure services
- Library Service

Key items covered during the 23/24 financial year include:

## **Enterprise and Employment**

### Business Growth Programme and the Business Support Service

The Business Growth Programme was a business support initiative that had been running since 2014 and ended on 30 June 2023. It is to be replaced with the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and is currently funded until March 2025. The Council's Business Investment and Growth Team will work in partnership to deliver Place Based Business Support, using lessons learned from the ERDF Business Growth Programme. The aim is to deliver business support at the local level through direct commissioned delivery and by linking businesses into the wider UKSPF programmes and other support initiatives in the LCR. The Programme is for new business start-ups as well as established businesses.

### Halton and St Helen's Voluntary Action Update

The Chief Executive of Halton and St Helens Voluntary Action, Sally Yeoman, gave an update on the Organisation's strategic priorities, training, development and capacity building, and the support given to local groups. Information included:

- The Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector in the Liverpool City Region (LCR);
- The LCR VCFSE Infrastructure Partnership;
- The LCR VCFSE Manifesto 2021-24 - the three priority areas;
- Equality and diversity in the region for all;
- The generation of economic growth locally and investing in communities;
- Employment and skills opportunities for all;
- Recent investment; and
- Opportunities for collaboration.

## **Adult Learning and Skills**

### Halton Adult Learning Service Performance 22/23

Adult Learning provision for 22/23 was funded through the Adult Education Budget (AEB), devolved to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA). In addition to this, funding was also available for Test and Learn initiatives and for the City Region Wide Pathways to Teaching project, coordinated by Halton Adult Learning. The Board was advised that all budgets were managed and monitored through regular scrutiny and accountability meetings between the CA Relationship Manager and Senior service Leaders within Halton Adult Learning.

Following an Ofsted inspection, the Adult Learning Service maintained a 'Good' rating.

### Pathways to Teaching Project

The Pathways to Teaching Project is co-ordinated by HBC's Employment, Learning and Skills Division, on behalf of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA). It is an inclusive programme, aimed at supporting residents across the Liverpool City Region in taking their first steps towards a teaching career within the Adult Education Sector, by:

- Removing potential barriers for prospective tutors to undertake training, such as funding and childcare;
- Providing the opportunity to experience the Adult Education sphere from a tutor's perspective through placements in their own Local Authority;
- Supporting learners with the achievement of qualifications.

It has four key principles:

- Develop the knowledge and understanding of Education and Training from an Adult Learning perspective through the achievement of the Level 3 Award in Education and Training;
- Understand the meaning of the wider curriculum (Safeguarding, British Values, Equality and Diversity), and develop the skills to effectively bed these into an effective Scheme of Work;
- Experience working in an Adult Learning setting, and are supported by a mentor within that setting; and
- Potentially progress into a higher level teaching qualification (Level 5 or 7), and ultimately gain employment as a tutor within the Local Authority where they have completed their placement (these are undertaken within the participants' chosen authority and will be in the learners' chosen subject area where this is reasonably practicable).

### Halton People into Jobs (HPIJ) Update

HPIJ's future focus is to engage with more economically inactive residents for Ways to Work and the new Work and Health Pioneer Programme. Economically inactive individuals are those not in work and not actively seeking work (unlike unemployed individuals who are actively seeking work). This changes the focus to much harder to reach residents, often with complex employment needs. Funding is from UKSPF and the programme will start in April 2024 and will initially run for 12 months.

### **Culture and Leisure Services**

#### The Brindley Theatre

The financial position of The Brindley was scrutinised, since its opening in 2004. The report also requested that Members delegate the full commercial programming of the Brindley Theatre to the Brindley Manager and Leisure Services Divisional Manager, which was agreed. It was recognised that the commercial programming of the venue was critical to maximising income and to maintain the Venue's break even position, in what was a highly competitive and challenging marketplace.

#### Leisure Centre Operations

Leisure Centre attendance figures for 2022/23 were provided to the Board; these would be used as comparisons from one year to the next, to show any increases / decreases for the service.

The Council's new Leisure Centre is on site and has progressed throughout 2023/24, and is on time and on budget, with a current anticipated opening date of Spring 2025.

## Community and Greenspace Update

The Community and Greenspace Department comprises 4 areas:

- Environmental Services;
- Leisure Services;
- Community Safety and Protection; and
- Stadium and Catering Services.

## **Library Service**

### Library Strategy 2023-28

It was reported that the new Strategy had been produced in-house by the libraries team and all library staff had been given the opportunity to comment and provide input. The Strategy provided useful information for the customer on what the Library Service offered and set objectives for the next 5 years, to improve the service and ensure it moved forward and widened the customer base. Following the Board's consideration of the draft Strategy, it would be taken to Executive Board for adoption.

## **Miscellaneous Items**

### The Big Conversation

The Big Conversation was about engaging with the public so that they understood the challenges that the Council was facing. It was an approach between the Council and those who lived or worked in Halton to work together to create an improved Borough in all aspects of everyday life. A stakeholder analysis and a Communications Plan was developed in order to generate and establish as many opportunities as possible to involve all stakeholders in many different ways. The consultation closed on 30 November 2023 with the aim to feed into the Council's new Corporate Plan, which was launched in April 2024:

Total Number of responses: 1076

Response by Area: Runcorn: 55%; Widnes: 45%

The top 3 priorities identified by our stakeholders were:

- Environment / Open spaces / Litter / Overgrowth / Maintain green spaces / Keep street free of litter and weeds
- Regeneration / Business / Economy / Support growth and town centres
- Housing / Affordability / Increase supported living / Improved infrastructure.

### Halton's 50th Anniversary

In order to recognise this momentous occasion, plans had been made for HBC, external organisations and groups to hold activities and events throughout 2024. The aim was to involve as many schools, local community groups and individuals as possible, and small grants would be available to assist in the planning and delivery of activities. It was noted that a temporary externally funded Culture Officer post had been created, utilising UK Share Prosperity Funding. They would assist in the preparations for the celebrations and work alongside colleagues in Leisure Services.