

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, 18 November 2024 in the Board Room - Municipal Building, Widnes

Present: Councillors Jones (Chair), Teeling (Vice-Chair), Abbott, Connolly, Garner, S. Hill and Ryan

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Hutchinson, McDonough and Stretch

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: A. Jones, S. McDonald, L. Carr and N. Goodwin

Also in attendance: None

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

ELS14 MINUTES

The Minutes from the meeting held on 16 September 2024, were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

ELS15 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Board was advised that no public questions had been received.

ELS16 PROPOSED TOPIC GROUP ITEM ON VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY GROUP FUNDING

The Board considered the proposal for the Employment, Learning and Skills, and Community Policy and Performance Board to form a topic group, to discuss the funding of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Halton.

It was noted that in February 2023 the Executive Board agreed to reduce the funding for voluntary and community groups and in March 2024, full Council approved the budget for 2024-25, which included a reduction in funding for these groups.

Members discussed the proposal for the topic group and its objective, as well as the implications of reduced funding for charities going forward, in particular those who were core funded. It was also suggested that the topic group looks at the voluntary sector as a whole.

All Members supported the proposal and it was agreed that the scrutiny topic group be held. All Members of the Board were invited to participate. A date in December would be agreed with Officers and Members advised accordingly.

RESOLVED: That the Board agrees with the proposal to conduct a scrutiny topic group on the funding of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Halton.

Executive Director
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ELS17 HALTON PEOPLE INTO JOBS – UPDATE ON ENGAGING WITH ECONOMICALLY INACTIVE RESIDENTS AND HALTON PEOPLE INTO JOBS CURRENT FUNDING POSITION

The Board considered a report from the Executive Director – Environment and Regeneration, which provided an overview of the current services provided by Halton People into Jobs (HPIJ).

HPIJ had successfully delivered a range of DWP Welfare to Work Programmes since 2011, including the Work Programme, Ways to Work, the Work and Health Programme, JETS and more recently the Work and Health Programme Pioneer Support Programme. It was noted that all of these programmes had supported unemployed Halton residents with looking for and sustaining employment. Further, recent funding streams continued to focus more on engaging with and supporting Economically Inactive residents into work and helping those ‘at risk’ of redundancy.

Members also received an update on current funding streams and information on the requirement for HPIJ to secure future funding, to sustain the service it provided to Halton’s residents.

Board Members were disappointed to learn and raised concerns about the uncertainty of the future of the HPIJ service, due to the imminent cessation of funding of *Restart*, *Pioneer* and the *Work and Health Programme*, where referrals to these had already stopped. The following information was provided in response to Members’ challenge:

- HPIJ was not a statutory service and had to generate income to cover 100% of overall costs;
- One Member suggested contacting the Halton Foundation for support for individuals that may require funding;
- It was estimated that approximately 6 months funding was required to keep the service operating as it was currently, to allow time for future funding to be identified and secured;
- The HPIJ service had huge social value in the community and to lose it would have a knock on effect on other Council services;
- A number of staff at HPIJ would be placed 'at risk' of redundancy unless any future funding was confirmed; and
- Members were reassured that every effort was being made to work with the LCR to secure funding beyond March 2025.

The Board commented that they would support the lobbying of the LCR to make interim funding available so that the service could continue; and to secure future funding. The HPIJ provided a valuable service to many of Halton's residents and Members recognised the challenging work carried out by the staff over the years and the continued successful results.

On behalf of the Board, the Chair passed on thanks to all the staff at HPIJ and commented that their experience in carrying out their duties was of huge value to the Council and the clients they dealt with.

RESOLVED: That the report is noted.

ELS18 THE BRINDLEY ENHANCEMENT PROJECT

The Board received a report and accompanying presentation on the Brindley Enhancement project. This included time lapse videos of the building work taking place and the 'on foot' access to the temporary entrance at the rear of the building from the car park at Costa Coffee.

It was reported that The Brindley Enhancement project formed part of the Town Deal Fund – Reconnecting Runcorn Programme. This transformational project would not only act as a catalyst for the Reconnecting Runcorn Programme, but also transform The Brindley into a cultural hub for the Borough. It would provide a new space for Runcorn Library, a larger café facility and a provide a high quality outdoor green space.

The programme of works had started in July 2024 and completion was expected in the Summer of 2026. In the meantime, Members were advised that The Brindley Theatre was operating 'business as usual'.

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

- All job roles within the new building were compliant with disabled access, so anyone could work in any role;
- Two new toilets were located on the first floor;
- More staff would be required to work at the theatre as the café would be bigger and they would like to offer pre-theatre meals;
- New signage had been installed in all directions leading to The Brindley and there was a designated coach parking bay in the car park;
- The Costa Coffee car park was now the designated car park for The Brindley;
- Runcorn Library would be moving into the Brindley once the new extension is complete; and
- The Brindley was an asset to Halton and all stakeholders were be proud of the facility.

Members welcomed the presentations and update and recognised that this enhancement project would have a positive impact on local communities and add vibrancy to the Town Centre. Members advised that they would appreciate a site visit in the future.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be received.

ELS19 QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT OF 2024 / 25

The Board received the performance management reports for quarter 2 of 2024-25 (1 July 2024 to 30 September 2024) and were requested to consider and raise any questions or points of clarification in respect of these.

The key priorities for development or improvement in 2024-25 were agreed by Members and for the various function areas reported to the Board as follows:

- Enterprise, Employment and Skills; and
- Community and Environment.

The report detailed progress against service objectives and milestones and performance targets and

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provided information relating to key developments and emerging issues that had arisen during the period. Members were invited to highlight any areas of interest and/or concern where further information is to be provided to a future meeting of the Board.

In response to the information provided in the report, Members questioned the following:

- The need for a housing consultant – more information was requested on this;
- Sci-tech Daresbury Project Violet – more information requested on what this was;
- Empty properties – what was the Council’s stance on this;
- Reasons why the School Cleaning Services were over budget;
- Reasons why there were delays in HR with recruitment processes;
- EEP2 – details requested on the caretaking and security services restructure;
- An explanation was requested on how the landfill tax credit works; and
- The transition of schools from Council supply to their own supply of school meals – these were now being provided by a mix of providers as schools were able to source their own. It was noted that the statutory duty to provide schools meals lies with the schools.

Responses to the above questions would be sought and sent to Members following the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the quarter two performance management report be received.

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Meeting ended at 8.40 p.m.