

## ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25

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

**Councillor Eddie  
Jones  
Chair**

Welcome to our Annual Report. The last Municipal year has again been eventful and challenging for the Council. Much hard work and creative thinking has been called for amidst the efforts to deliver services and projects for our residents. Therefore, I offer my personal thanks to the Officers who have worked diligently with the Vice Chair and myself to devise, develop and bring forward Agenda items to the PPB. I appreciate and commend the quality of reports and presentations that have been produced and built upon during the year. We should also recognise here the valuable input from external contributors that has informed and been welcomed by Members at our meetings.

I believe this has all contributed to very relevant agendas which members have been keen to interrogate and progress. A concept that the members of the Board have enthusiastically and skilfully embraced. I feel sure that Board members will continue to demonstrate that same intellectual vigour and rigour in the coming year. I am also certain that by alternating between challenge and cooperative problem solving, the members of this Board will continue to proactively shape the quality of services we provide to our residents.

I really must thank my colleagues on our PPB for bringing such passion and commitment to the table. I trust that the Board will continue to make a worthy contribution to creating an economically prosperous and equitable Borough for us all, despite this challenging environment.

Thank you.

#### **MEMBERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Board comprised of eleven Councillors: -

Councillor Eddie Jones (Chair)  
Councillor Angela Teeling (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor John Abbott  
Councillor Neil Connolly  
Councillor Emma Garner  
Councillor Stan Hill  
Councillor Noel Hutchinson  
Councillor Katy McDonough  
Councillor Christopher Rowe  
Councillor Mike Ryan  
Councillor Tom Stretch

The primary function of the Employment, Learning & Skills and Community Policy and Performance Board (ELS&C PPB) is as set out in the Council's constitution, 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 & Skills
- Culture and Leisure Services
- Library Services

## **REVIEW OF THE YEAR**

The Board met 4 times during the Municipal Year 2023/24:

- 17th June 2024
- 16<sup>th</sup> September 2024
- 18<sup>th</sup> November 2024
- 24<sup>th</sup> February 2025

Some of the main activities and issues that have come before the Board during the year are set out below.

## **ENTERPRISE AND EMPLOYMENT**

### **HPIJ – Employer Initiatives**

HPIJ delivered a wide range of DWP Welfare to Work programmes since 2011 that included the Work Programme, Ways to Work, the Work and Health Programme JETS and the Work and Health Programme Pioneer Support Programme. These programmes have helped Halton residents look for work and sustain employment.

There had also been a range of externally funded projects funded by the DWP such as Future Jobs Fund and Kick Start that provided financial incentives / grants to employers to recruit unemployed and economically inactive residents. There was also the Intermediate Labour Market Wage subsidy Programme (ESF / SIF) funded through Ways to Work; this has been available since 2016.

Funding had been secured through the LCR to continue to deliver the Ways to Work programme from October 2023 – March 2024 before the UKSPF funded activities from April 2024 – March 2025.

### **HPIJ update on engaging with the Economically inactive residents and current funding position.**

Since 2011 HPIJ had successfully delivered a range of DWP welfare programmes including the Work Programme, Ways to Work, the Work and Health Programme, JETS and more recently the Work and Health Programme Pioneer Support Programme. The programmes support Halton residents who are unemployed look for sustainable employment. Recent funding streams enabled HPIJ to continue to focus on engaging and supporting economically inactive residents into work and helping those 'at risk' of redundancy. HPIJ supported 100 economically inactive residents into employment between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 through Ways to Work and Pioneer Programmes

An update on the current funding streams was provided and information provided on the requirement for HPIJ to secure funding to sustain the service that it provides to Halton Residents.

### **Supported Internship Programme Work Based Study**

The programme is for young people aged between 16 – 24 with special educational needs and / or disabilities who had an education, health and care plan (EHCP).

The programme is delivered by the Employment, Learning and Skills division in collaboration with HPIJ and Adult Learning. The contract is to deliver 11 Supported Internships every academic year. In the financial year to March, we supported 8 so we are on target to achieve 11 by September.

Case studies were shared on 3 individuals who had completed a Supported Internship and are now working in part time paid employment.

### **Sci-Tech Daresbury**

Mr Leake the Business Growth Director for Sci-Tech Daresbury who advised that the Sci-Tech Daresbury site was one of the only 6 science and technology campuses in the UK and this was the only one in the North of England.

Sci-Tech Daresbury Talent and Skills Strategy was developed in 2021 and was a key component of the Sci-Tech Daresbury Strategy for Science, Innovation and Growth. It focussed on attracting, developing and retaining the wide range of skills and expertise essential to establishing Sci-Tech Daresbury as a global beacon of Science and technology, focussed innovation and entrepreneurship.

Key activities and recent successes were shared as well as a summary of the priorities of the 2025 action plan.

## **ADULT LEARNING AND SKILLS**

### **Liverpool City Region Employment and Skills**

A number of conversations were taking place in the LCR on the proposition of Employment and Skills, Long term skills plan, Early years sector workforce provision, construction sector priorities, Department for Work and Pensions and Economies for Healthy Lives.

### **Halton Adult Learning Summary – Academic Year 23/24**

There are a range of accredited and non-accredited community learning courses delivered in Runcorn and Widnes, with the aim to improve residents lives and address skills gaps in the borough and across the Liverpool City Region (LCR).

Family Learning was also delivered in Halton schools and co-ordinated the Pathways to Teaching Programme on behalf of the LCR Combined Authority (LCRCA). Also co-deliver the Supported Internship Programme with Halton People into Jobs. The service aimed to improve the breadth of the curriculum offer to give adults in the borough wider opportunities for development.

Adult Learning enrolments had increased by 50% since 21-22, the retention rates across the service were good at 91.1% however there are concerns with the retention and achievement rates for Maths and English.

Promotion of the Adult Learning Service is done via brochures and flyers and promoted by staff running the service on its Facebook page.

Funding to multiply a national initiative ends in March 2025.

## **CULTURE AND LEISURE SERVICES**

### **The Brindley Enhancement Project**

The project forms part of the Town Deal fund – Reconnecting Runcorn Programmes looking to transform the Brindley into a cultural hub for the borough and providing new space for Runcorn Library, a larger café and high quality outdoor green space. The works began on site in July 2024 with completion expected in Summer 2026. Although work has begun the Brindley is operating as business as usual.

Adult enrolments had almost grown by 50%.

## **LIBRARY SERVICE**

The library in Runcorn has moved to its temporary home in the former HPIJ unit on Church street to facilitate the delivery of the Health and Education hub in Runcorn, prior to it moving to the Brindley in 2026. Since it moved there has been an increase in people accessing the service which is welcome news.

## **MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS**

### Riverside College

A Presentation was provided by the Principal of Riverside College on various areas of interest, including key developments taking place. There had been recent skills development and investment which included:

- An £8.5m Health and Wellbeing, Business, Computing and Immersive Room opened in June 2023 on the Cronton campus.
- New sports facilities Opened on the Cronton campus in November 2023.
- A new music hub and teaching block would open in Cronton in 2025.
- A hydrogen pipework rig opened March 2024 on the Riverside campus.
- As part of a joint venture with the Council and NHS a Health and Education Hub would be developed offering Health and Social Care and Maths and English courses, funded by Runcorn Town Deal.

### Halton Cancer Support Centre

The centre provides therapeutic support for people who were affected by cancer offering professional quality service with warmth and compassion, responding to the needs of local people.

At the time of the presentation there were 851 clients registered at the centre. 400 had received a cancer diagnosis and the remaining 400 were a mix of carers and the bereaved.

A number of services are offered through the centre such as peer support, counselling, online support, therapies, respite breaks, a Children and Young People service and workshops.

The centre is funded by Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Partnership and Halton Borough Council with remaining costs covered by grants and fundraising events.

The charity will reach its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in May 2025.

### **Proposed Topic Group**

A proposal was made to form a topic group to discuss the funding of the voluntary and community sector in Halton following the agreed reduction in Funding by Executive Board in February 2023 and in March 2024 full Council approved the budget for 24-25 that included the reduction for the groups. Agreement from the board to hold a scrutiny topic group that would look at the whole of the voluntary sector.

### **Halton Credit Union - Wearebeacon**

Beacon Savings previously Halton Credit Union. Beacon Savings is a not for profit organisation that provides ethical products and services to those who struggle to get credit. The change of name was part of the rebranding of the service so that it was non-geographical as it was expanding across Cheshire and some neighbouring areas such as Liverpool and Stoke on Trent. Services available are family loans, save to borrow, secured borrowing for high savers a salary saving scheme with payroll partners, life insurance at no cost to Members and a Christmas savings club.

Support is provided to employees and employers as one in four people worried about debt or money issues which in turn could affect their performance at work. The salary schemes offered helped employees to be able to afford loans and better manage their money. Work is carried out with partners such as the NHS, the Council, nurseries, the Chamber of Commerce but wanted to partner with more business to offer the same service.

### **Council wide Spending as of November 2024**

The overall revenue and capital spending by each department and the key variances from budget outlined.

### **DURING 2025/26 THE BOARD PLANS TO FOCUS ON:**

- Plans for the continuation of the Ways to Work programme and other initiatives to support our residents as funding is devolved to the Combined Authority
- Further scrutiny around the HPIJ and Adult learning programmes, with a focus on working with employers around the Borough working with HEP partners and the Business Investment and Growth team.
- The success of the new Leisure Centre.
- Monitoring the Brindley extension to facilitate the relocated Library and enhance the culture offer in the Borough.

### **Contact Officer for the Board**

Members of the public are welcome at the meetings of the Board. If you would like to know where and when meetings are to be held or if you would like any more information about the Board or its work please contact Damian Cooke, Director Economy, Enterprise & Property on 0151 511 6468 or via email [damian.cooke@halton.gov.uk](mailto:damian.cooke@halton.gov.uk)