

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

**DATE:** 17 September 2012

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director - Policy & Resources.

**SUBJECT:** Employment, Learning & Skills Quarterly Policy  
Update

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To inform the Board of recent national policy announcements relevant to employment, learning and skills.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the report be noted.**

## **3.0 BACKGROUND**

3.1 A steady flow of policy announcements, consultation exercises, reports and ministerial statements are issued by government departments and agencies with varying degrees of relevance to issues on the employment, learning and skills agenda and related topics.

3.2 Therefore, brief summaries of key announcements in a digest format to the board are provided on a quarterly basis, along with observations of local relevance, where appropriate, so the Board can consider whether to initiate more detailed scrutiny and/or a more detailed report to a future meeting.

## **4.0 RECENT KEY POLICY ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **4.1 Results of Portas Pilot Rounds 1 and 2**

Details of the launch of the 'Portas Pilot' exercise were covered in the report to your previous meeting. The result of the first round was announced on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2012 and out of a total of 371 applications, twelve were successful. Unfortunately, Halton's Runcorn bid was not successful.

First round winners in the north west region were Nelson in east Lancashire and Stockport in Greater Manchester.

The result of the second round, which had been launched on the closing date of round one, was announced in late July, and there were 15 successful applications out of a total of 358 bids. Morecambe and Liverpool (Lodge Lane) were the north west's successes.

At the same time a new web based encyclopaedia, '*100 Ways to Help the High Street*', was published by the the Association of Town Centre Management (ATCM). This has been compiled with the support of Government departments as a reference and good practice guide for town centre partnership.

It offers an on-line resource with advice for struggling town centres and high streets in England. Schemes and case studies featured cover topics ranging from enhancing the landscape, to consumer marketing, animation and events, partnership working, making the High Street accessible, attracting investment and getting the business mix right and the evening and night time economy.

"100 Ways" also examines the powers now available to local authorities, businesses and communities by the 2011 Localism Act and the National Planning Policy Framework to undertake positive change in an innovative way. The resource can be accessed [HERE](#) .

**COMMENT;** There were nearly 400 applications for entry onto the programme over the two rounds. Therefore, whilst it is disappointing that the Runcorn application was not successful, the work that went into putting together the bid has provided a base for the development of the town centre partnership along with the £100,000 High Street Innovation Fund grant from Government.

## 4.2 Queen's Speech

Not a great deal of direct significance to the employment, learning and skills agenda.

Three bills of varying relevance;

Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill.

Key measures include:

Changes to the employment tribunal system; encouraging parties to settle disputes before lodging an employment tribunal claim through ACAS early conciliation and greater use of Settlement Agreements. The aim is to make the determination of less complex disputes quicker and cheaper for employers and employees, through a new 'Rapid Resolution' scheme

A new Competition and Markets Authority; brings together the competition functions of the Office of Fair Trading and Competition Commission. It will be the principal competition authority with a remit to tackle anti-competitive behaviour and to ensure open markets. It should be faster, with clearer timeframes bringing greater certainty and reduced burdens on business.

A UK Green Investment Bank; accelerating long-term private sector investment in the UK's transition to a green economy. Will secure its operational independence and provides Government with a specific power to finance it, with initial funding of £3 billion to March 2015.

Other elements include giving shareholders binding votes on the pay of directors of UK quoted companies and reducing the inspection and regulatory burdens on businesses, especially SMEs, and to improved access for small and medium sized businesses ('SME's') to advice on complying with trading standards, health & safety, and environmental health regulations.

#### Draft Water Bill

Key element is provision for the opening of the market in water and sewerage services.

#### Draft Energy Bill

Plans to introduce a system of low-carbon generation revenue support via a feed-in tariff with contracts for Difference (FiT-CfD).

**COMMENT:** Whilst the Enterprise Bill should have little direct impact upon the council other than in its role as a large employer, the draft water and energy bills may offer, albeit limited, opportunities to reduce energy, water and sewerage costs for the council.

### **4.3 Beecroft Report on Employment Law**

The final report on the reform of employment law by Adrian Beecroft was eventually published in May, after much speculation in the media as to its key proposals over several months. Whilst the final report did see some 'watering-down' of the more contentious proposals in earlier drafts, it still included radical recommendations across a wide range of issues, including introduction of 'no-fault' dismissal and a significant weakening of TUPE regulations and redundancy consultation notice periods, especially for employees of SME's.

**COMMENT:** The contentious nature of some of the proposals and the open opposition within the Coalition Government to them means that several are likely not to be taken forward. However, the reduction of 'red tape' for SME's and changes to Employment Tribunals are included in the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill noted at section 4.3 above.

### **4.4 Talent Match**

In June Big Lottery Fund (BIG) launched 'Talent Match', an ambitious £100 million investment aimed at tackling youth unemployment.

BIG has worked with young people to plan effective ways to help other young people to lead fulfilling lives through employment and training. The result is the Talent Match programme - an investment that will target the 21 Local Enterprise Partnerships ('LEPs') where those aged 18-24 are finding it hardest to secure jobs or training opportunities because of the economic downturn. The Liverpool City Region LEP is included on the list.

Talent Match aims to put charities at the heart of local partnerships established between local councils, charities, employers, and colleges to develop proposals on how to make best use of the funding to help match the talents of local young people with skills and opportunities of the future.

Grant ranging from £1 million to £10 million in each of the targeted areas, to create a portfolio of activities lasting up to five years is proposed.

The Talent Match programme guide can be downloaded from [HERE](#).

**Comment:** It is too early to assess the success or impact of the programme. However, it is an innovative approach to help address youth employment at a time of diminishing resources.

#### **4.5 Apprenticeships**

An OFSTED report into a group of providers identified as delivering high quality provision was published in June as part of the Government's response to criticism about the quality of some apprenticeships.

Key messages for each of the three partners were;

Students– right attitude and commitment (prior work experience was identified as a significant positive success factor)

Providers – full and honest assessment of the suitability of the 'match' of the student to the most appropriate apprenticeship, followed-up by the provision of active ongoing support throughout the duration of the apprenticeship.

Employers – an understanding of what an apprenticeship is, the commitment required, and proper and active monitoring of a student's development.

**COMMENT:** The study highlighted a series of examples of good practice, which the Council will refer to with regard to its own developing apprenticeship programme

## 4.5 Universal Jobmatch

The Department of Work and Pensions has released more details about its 'Universal Jobmatch' web-based job posting and matching service, due to be launched in late autumn 2012.

The aim of Universal Jobmatch is to be one of the UK's largest jobsites and to help make job searching easier for users by automatically matching a jobseeker's CV and skills to the jobs that suit their needs.

To take advantage of the new service jobseekers have to register with the online service and provide an email address. Therefore, efforts are underway to increase access to the internet for jobseekers and also that they have an appropriate email address registered.

**COMMENT:** Whilst the provision of such a website is not innovative in itself, the fact that it will have access to JobCentrePlus' job vacancy database should make it a powerful tool. Local partners are working hard to help Halton's jobseekers get access to the internet via public portals, and to gain confidence in navigating and using it as a job search tool.

## 4.6 2011 Census

The first set of data (called the 'First Release') of the 2011 Census was published in July. It gave details of the total number, breakdown by age and sex, and the occupied households estimates for each local authority in England and Wales.

The 2011 census population estimate for Halton is 125,800 with 53,300 occupied households. In 2001 the census population count was 118,208 with 47,948 households. As expected, the changes reflect national trends of a growing and ageing population living in smaller households.

The Second Release (Nov 2012 – Feb 2013) will give us ward and super output area data across a range of aspects including data on economic activity and hours worked.

The Third Release (Mar 2013 – June 2013): will include more detailed data at local authority and ward level including on sex and age by economic activity and sex and occupation by age.

**COMMENT:** The results of the 2011 Census will provide us with an important evidence base for a wide range of social characteristics. Also, as more detailed information is released over the coming months there may be implications for the Council's priorities and strategies.

The Office for National Statistics estimates that each person counted in the census is worth up to £5,000 to a local authority over ten years. This means that an undercount of just 100 people could mean Halton misses out on around £500,000 worth of funding over the next decade.

The population increase is important, as the amount of money Halton has to spend on services over the next ten years is directly influenced by how many people are counted in the borough. Current financial settlements will be based on the 2010 population estimates. Therefore, there may be grounds to revisit financial settlements.

#### **4.7 Welfare Reforms; Universal Credit**

As part of preparations for the roll-out of Universal Credit next year, 15 English local authorities, short-listed for consideration as one of around a dozen Universal Credit (UC) pilots due to start in autumn 2012, were announced in July. The pilots will focus on delivering the face to face support some people may need to make claims for Universal Credit, including online support, help with budgeting and job searches, reducing fraud and error, and reducing homelessness. From these recommendations, DWP will make a final selection of those that will go ahead in the autumn. The north west authorities included in the shortlist are Oldham and Wigan.

Work has also started locally by partners to identify and contact benefit claimants whose current entitlement will be reduced in line with the 'cap' that is due to come into effect from next April; £500 per week (£26,000 per annum) for households with children or £350 per week for single claimants without children. It is currently estimated that between 120 and 150 claimants will be affected in Halton.

**COMMENT:** The introduction of Universal Credit is the biggest single change to the welfare benefit system since its introduction in the 1940's. The experience of the pilots will hopefully be used to help inform the smooth transfer over to the new system from April 2013 for new claimants.

#### **5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

The varied range of issues covered in this report potentially present a number of challenges and opportunities across a number of the Council's current priorities. Each would therefore require a thorough analysis at some point in the future.

#### **6.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

There are no immediate risks or opportunities directly relating to the information in the report at this point in time. Again, a full assessment could be necessary at some point in the future.

## **7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

Not applicable.

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

If members require a more detailed analysis of any of the issues in this report, or copies of any of the documents referred to, they should contact;

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