

Employment, Learning & Skills SSP

Minutes of Executive Group Meeting 10th December 2012

2.00 pm, Kingsway Learning Centre, Widnes.

Present:

Wesley Rourke (In the Chair)
Sue Baxendale
Chris Biggs
Nick Mannion
Cleo Pollard
Helen Woollacott
Hitesh Patel
Siobhan Saunders
Hazel Coen
Cllr Eddie Jones

Organisation:

Economy, Enterprise & Property (HBC)
Halton Housing Trust
Greater Merseyside Connexions
Strategic Policy & Partnership (HBC)
Halton Parents & Carers Forum
Skills Funding Agency
Halton CAB
Employment, Learning & Skills (HBC)
Performance & Improvement (HBC)
Halton Borough Council

Apologies were received from:

David Gray
Kevin Smith
Claire Bradbury
Diane Sproson
Simon Clough
Janine Peterson
Catherine Johnson
Cllr Sue Edge

Welfare Rights (HBC)
Riverside College, Halton
Power in Partnership
Greater Merseyside Connexions
Children & Young People (HBC)
JCP
Performance & Improvement (HBC)
Halton Borough Council

1. **Welcome/Introductions**

- 1.1 The Chair, Wesley Rourke, welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 1.2 Introductions were made.
- 1.3 There were no personal or pecuniary declarations of interest.

2. **Minutes of last meeting and matters arising**

The minutes of the meeting on Monday 30th October 2012 were reviewed and confirmed as accurate subject to the following correction.

- 2.1 HL's apologies had been omitted from the draft minutes.
- 2.2 Item 3.2 HW advised that the tendering documentation had been published on 6th December 2012.

Action; HW to pass information to NM for cascade to the group.

3. Partner Updates

- 3.1 HBC, Employment, Learning & Skills (SS). The service successfully achieved its 'Matrix' re-accreditation recently, with several aspects highlighted as good practice.
- 3.2 Halton Housing Trust (SB); Outlined HHT's current and planned programme of support for their customers (including members of tenants' households). Helping customers prepare and cope with the major changes coming in as part of welfare reform is a key objective.

WR advised that the LCR City Employment Steering Group had recently received a presentation from senior JCP managers on the welfare reforms, and that partners had been urged to accelerate their work to prepare for the impact of the changes on their services and customers.

- 3.3 Halton Citizens Advice Bureau (HP): The CAB is currently going through a 'downsizing' exercise, because of reductions in external funding. Currently virtually 100% of their income is by way of grants from the public sector. Striving to minimise the impact on customers, by working to design and target service at those in greatest need.

Also promoting on-line 'self-help' service and to raise the proportion of referrals via third party referral. This will help to deliver the objective of helping those in greatest need.

Looking to increase the number of volunteers working at the two CAB offices in Halton, and to explore ways to engage with private sector employers.

WR suggested that at next meeting may be useful to work through a small sample of case studies. Need to understand the impact on the ELS agenda and to explore ways in which partners can work together to make interventions as effective as possible and maximise the number of residents that can be supported.

Action; NM & HP to liaise to prepare a small portfolio of cases studies for next meeting.

4. Liverpool City Region Skills & Employment Update.

- 4.1 EJ outlined where this agenda fits into the LCR governance structure, and its membership.

Its aim is to co-ordinate and reconcile the work of key partners across the city region on the employment agenda to maximise impact and remove wasteful duplication – a vital and complex challenge in the current economic environments.

One local example is how the maximum benefit for local residents and businesses can be extracted from major capital projects such as the Mersey Gateway and Liverpool Superport.

- 4.2 Other objectives are youth employment, made harder by the very different needs and aspirations of young people and that of employers and the related 'Skills for Growth' challenge to address the mis-match in the current availability of training provision against likely future needs if the city region is to maximise employment growth. The £1,550 grant to employers to employ each additional apprentice is an example.

5. Sustainable Community Strategy Half Year Report.

- 5.1 HC outlined the report. Pleased that despite the difficult economic situation there has been generally good progress across the whole suite of the partnership's KPIs.

- 5.2 Those three areas where performance has been below target - ELS3, ELS6 and ELS7, performance has still be generally satisfactory and Halton has outperformed the regional trend, if not achieved our own original targets.
- 5.3 WR stressed that these targets in some cases date from before the current Coalition Government and its very different strategies on a number of policy areas that have had varying degrees of impact on subsequent performance. Therefore, he wished to place on record his appreciation of the hard work of partners in these challenging times.
- 5.4 HC then explained Appendix 2 of the report: draft KPI's and targets for 2013/14 and beyond. These have previously been circulated to the respective leads and now need to be confirmed before going forward to the HSPB for formal adoption.

Action; NM to circulate to the Group with a FINAL deadline for any comments and/or amendments of Monday 7th January 2013.

6. LCR Apprentice of the Year Awards, 2013.

- 6.1 NM outlined the details of these inaugural awards with categories for both apprentices, including one specifically for Halton's Apprentice of the Year, and also awards for employers.
- 6.2 The closing date for nominations is noon on **18th January 2013**, with a gala Presentation evening at St. George's Hall, Liverpool on 12th March 2013. There are also sponsorship and opportunities to attend the event.

Action; Members to promote the event as widely as possible and to discuss the possibility of sponsoring and/or attending the awards evening in March.

7. Sub-Group Updates.

- 7.1 SS briefly outlined the key points of the recent Skills Group and the Halton Employment Partnership ('HEP') meeting that had met earlier today.
- 7.2 The three consortia bidding for the Mersey Gateway contract had each submitted a provisional tender by the closing date. Final tenders are due in February 2013, with the successful consortia to be announced in May 2013, and work getting underway in summer 2013.

8. The Value of Volunteering as a way to Improve Skills

- 8.1 HP outlined the meaning of volunteering in the context of developing personal skills. It is a very diverse picture with formal recruitment, assessment and selection processes at one end of the scale and much looser informal casual arrangements at the other. Each is valid.
- 8.2 What is proven is that volunteering can bring significant and sustained benefits to both the volunteer and the organisation, and the more structured and planned the arrangement, the greater they benefits. This is recognised by Government.
- 8.3 However, for jobseekers volunteering can impact on benefit entitlement, and whilst the pending welfare reforms being introduced from 2013 may relax the current restrictions a little, they will remain a challenge.

8.4 There are many local examples of where volunteering works, but a key element is the access and affordability of local childcare for many, and this is currently under pressure.

8.5 HP then set-out three draft proposals:

- Map the skills and qualifications currently offered by Halton's community and voluntary sector and explore ways to correlate these with the current and future needs of local employers.
- Explore the practicalities of establishing formal partnerships between local educational institutions and voluntary sector, with the aim of providing local students an appropriate mix of formal learning and practical experience.
- Engage with local employers to encourage and support them to invest staff time and/or expertise in Halton's voluntary sector as a part of employees' career development.

These proposals are not new or radical, but are examples of some of the work being developed elsewhere and also locally in some cases during the time of successful Future Jobs Fund programme, that was terminated in late 2010.

8.6 There was a general consensus around these recommendations, and agreement that they should be incorporated wherever practical into partners' own plans and those of the Halton Sustainable Community Strategy and especially the ELS Action Plan.

9. Any Other Urgent Business

None

10. Future meetings

Monday 11th February 2013 ; Discussion Topic; To foster a culture of enterprise and entrepreneurship and make Halton an ideal place to start and grow a business.
Monday 13th May 2013
Monday 29th July 2013
Monday 21st October 2013
Monday 16th December 2013
Monday 10th February 2014

All meetings are at Kingsway Learning Centre, Widnes and start at **14:00**