

Employment Learning and Skills

1. To facilitate and create employment

The borough has experienced strong performance in reducing the number of people out of work. However, a number of challenges remain. For example, not as many local people are securing higher paid jobs at our prestigious sites in the borough. We want to further develop our relationships with the business community to improve this.

2. To promote access to learning for those who need it most

Low skills levels are still prevalent in the borough. Some residents are dissuaded from or are unable to participate in training and learning opportunities. We want to provide opportunities to all our residents, particularly the vulnerable or disadvantaged to support them in preparing for work.

Overview

The recent **Autumn Statement 2016** presents a number of opportunities and challenges for the department. The Statement emphasised a drive by Government to tackle long-term weaknesses in the national economy particularly around reducing the productivity gap. This presents opportunities for further investment in the borough through the recently announced National Productivity Investment Fund and Housing Infrastructure Fund. There were significant announcements relating specifically to the Northern Powerhouse and the launch of the Northern Powerhouse Strategy and Infrastructure Investment Plan. One of Halton's economic strengths has been its location and connectivity with road, rail, air and water. However, there are a number of the borough's regeneration sites which would benefit from improved access and public transport infrastructure.

The Chancellor also announced a further allocation of Growth Deal funding, some of which will provide support to enable businesses to grow and expand, will support skills development of the work force and, again improve transport infrastructure. There were also some measures that were targeted at families that are 'just about managing'. This again, has resonance with our Employment Learning and Skills Division, with a focus on 'making work pay'.

This brings added pressure on the team to deliver employment support and training particularly to those residents with significant challenges. Following on from this it was confirmed that the Work Programme will be replaced by the Work and Health Programme. This will see a significant down-sizing of our current employment support offer as the focus will be on people who are out of work owing to health reasons. In the past, the work programme has cross-subsidised some of our wider

employment, learning and skills functions and it may no longer be possible to provide these services.

There are also broad fiscal and legislative changes which may not immediately register as important to the borough, but will ultimately influence how the department's services will be delivered.

For example, whilst there will be a small increase in the minimum wage for all age categories and apprentices which helps with the department's employment, learning and skills remit.

But, this will potentially be a further increase in costs for traders at our markets, which could affect their profitability and therefore viability.

Ongoing discussions relating to Business Rates retention by Councils will probably influence where and when the Council would wish to invest resources in regeneration sites and assets.

Delivery of the Area Based Review of Further Education

The Review was completed in November 2016. However, there are a number of recommendations which will have an impact on service delivery in Halton, particularly in regard to the establishment of a Skills Commission which should improve the communication channels between businesses and skills training providers.

Business Growth Hub

The Business Growth Hub was launched in May 2016. The Growth Hub aims to simplify and provide consistent advice to businesses across the City Region. An emerging issue for the department will be to consider how we work more collaboratively with partners including the Halton Chamber of Commerce to deliver this.

Devolution of the Adult Education Budget

Devolution of the Adult Education Budget from 2018 will mean adult education funding is used to procure services rather than current set up of grant award. The department will need to oversee the processes to ensure that Halton continues to receive funding to deliver its adult education provision.

Ofsted Inspection

'Ofsted's Education and Skills Annual Report 2015/16 (published December 2016) is underpinned by the findings from inspection across early years, schools, and further education and skills. The Division's next Ofsted inspection is expectedly imminently (early 2017).

Employment, Learning and Skills Priority Actions 2017/18

1. Prepare for changes to work programme post June 2017 and forward plan to help advisers to prepare for this.

2. Apprenticeships Hub – broadening remit, managing the revised funding contract and monitoring progress.
3. Supporting the Council’s Apprenticeships plan by providing specialist support and access to HEP courses
4. Supporting Skills Group at Sci-Tech.
5. Developing and Implementing European Projects and Programmes.
6. Adult Learning changes to the curriculum for next year given reductions in funding.
7. Preparing for Inspection.
8. Deliver Youth Employment Gateway
9. Further developing our Employment and Business Partnership
10. Manage the Halton Employment Partnership

Culture & Community

- Ongoing delivery of Universal Library Offers
- Community Centres – Neighbourhood Hubs of opportunity
- Community Development – enablement and support

Overview

The Library Service continues to support a broad range of activities across the whole of the spectrum that provides services tailored to the needs and aspirations of local communities.

These include interventions targeted at both educational and recreational activity to support positive outcomes in terms of individual health and wellbeing for all age groups. Such work will include both traditional and innovative forms of interaction that simulate and sustain libraries as hubs of community learning and leisure.

The library will continue to focus upon developing and delivering initiatives to children and young people in the area of science and technology to develop digital skills and creativity. The service will also continue to deliver a programme of cultural activity, such as interactive theatre and sessions by authors.

New technology will continue to be deployed to deliver an inclusive approach and broaden reading experiences that are compatible with individual preferences, such as e-books and digital newspapers alongside hard copy titles.

The Council's community Centres also provide a range of services supporting individual communities and social interaction. Centres now provide increased digital access for users extending community library IT provision and deliver opportunities through skills development, adult education and job clubs.

During the coming year a marketing strategy will be developed to promote the Centres and seek new areas of business. This will contribute further to the financial sustainability of the centres and working towards a 7 day demand model will provide an enhanced offer to local residents and strengthen the hub concept of neighbourhood access.

The Community Development service will act collaboratively to identify gaps in existing Centre usage to develop further opportunities for engagement, access to services and community events.

The service will also focus upon its enabling role in supporting and advising local community groups in identifying and accessing funding from a range of sources to provide sustainable opportunities for local residents.