

## **EMPLOYMENT, LEARNING AND SKILLS POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD**

*At a meeting of the Employment, Learning and Skills Policy and Performance Board on Monday, 11 September 2006 at the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn*

Present: Councillors Jones (Chairman), E. Cargill, Edge, Findon, M Hodgkinson, Howard, Lewis, Parker, M Ratcliffe and Stockton

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Fraser

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: H. Cockcroft, G. Collins, A. Villiers, N. Goodwin, P. Sinnott and L. Cairns

Also in attendance: Mr H. Patel

### **ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD**

*Action*

Prior to the start of the meeting, the Chairman requested a minute's silence in memory of those affected by the terrorist attack on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001.

#### **ELS10 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2006, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

#### **ELS11 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

It was noted that no questions had been received.

#### **ELS12 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES**

The Board considered the Minutes relating to the Employment, Learning and Skills Policy and Performance Board which had been considered by the Executive Board and Executive Board Sub-Committee since 14<sup>th</sup> June 2006.

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes be noted.

## ELS13 LOCAL AREA AGREEMENTS

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy regarding Local Area Agreements (LAAs).

It was noted that an LAA was a three-year protocol that set out the priorities for a local area, agreed between Central Government and the area itself as represented by the lead local authority and other key partners through local strategic partnership. Halton was to be in Round 3 of the Programme which meant that an agreement must be negotiated by April 2007.

It was noted that LAAs did not carry with them extra funding, apart from a reward element. However, this was merely a rebranding of the financial rewards of local public service agreements. Halton had already negotiated its LPSA 2 and agreed its targets and arrangements for dividing/priming monies. Therefore, the LPSA2 was to be incorporated into the LAA.

Board Members considered the potential added value of the LAA. It was noted that Halton had recently carried out a lot of work on its Community Strategy and Community Plan which meant that the LAA process added less value for this Authority. However, it was noted that this process did allow an opportunity for local authorities to lobby the Government when outlining 'enabling' measures to achieve the objectives within the LAA.

Members were invited to feed back any comments directly to Mr. Ian Grady, Head of Strategic Policy and Partnership. In particular, Members agreed that the Strategies within the document should be cross-referenced in order to facilitate readers.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report and the outline of the process be noted; and
- (2) comments be forwarded to the Head of Strategic Policy and Partnership prior to the draft agreement's approval and submission to Government at the end of September 2006.

All

## ELS14 VOLUNTARY SECTOR GRANTS

The Board received a presentation from Mr. H. Patel

of the Halton Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) regarding the CAB's work and contribution to Halton's priorities.

It was noted that the CAB was a recipient of a major grant from Halton; for 2006/07 the CAB received £179,755. Mr. Patel confirmed that for every £1 of Halton Borough Council grant, the CAB "raised" the equivalent of £3 from other sources.

Mr. Patel covered a variety of issues including:

- the CAB's aims;
- staffing, including volunteers;
- number and type of enquiries;
- the advice service provided; and
- the impact of the CAB and what had been achieved.

In addition, Mr. Patel outlined future plans to improve the service and showed the Board a short film.

The Board considered a number of issues including the following:

- geography in respect of where clients came from – it was reported that, as part of the service level agreement, the CAB had started to track which wards clients came from. As Sure Start was no longer geography based, midwives were taking out leaflets to all new mothers with the CAB's ex-directory telephone number on it in order that contact could be made directly. Advisors were trained to ask if clients had young children and, if they did, they were passed straight to the Sure Start team. Mr. Patel confirmed that he would speak to the Sure Start managers to find out which children's centre was near to Weston Point in order that geography and transport issues could be raised with that manager. Mr. Patel confirmed that he would provide a ward breakdown for a future meeting;
- the possibility of being mobile around the Borough, for example by using the Benefits bus – it was reported that a strength of the CAB was its confidentiality away from the Benefits Team. However, there was internet access available on the bus which meant that clients could be referred by staff via the on-line

referral system. Mr. Patel confirmed that experience had shown that, for outreach work to be successful, offices needed to be in a venue consistently for some time for people to know they were there and access them accordingly;

- how success was measured – it was stated that this was not currently measured. It was considered that giving correct advice was a measure of success but this may be something that the client was not happy with if the advice was not what they wished to hear. However, the CAB was audited every year in respect of the quality of its advice and, every three years, head office sent people in to see if quality advice was being given. It was noted that Mr. Patel hoped to increase his voluntary team of advisors which would help dramatically with the workload without adding substantial extra costs;
- relationship between the Citizens' Advice Bureau and the Benefits Team – Mr. Patel confirmed that these worked closely together. The Benefits Team was considered to be specialists in that area whereas the CAB gave general advice. A protocol was currently being worked up and in addition, the CAB was contacted when the Benefits staff were being trained, in order that the CAB could utilise this training subject to capacity. Currently, both services were being promoted together as there was a lot of demand for this advice.

Mr. Patel confirmed that the three-year funding provided by the Council meant that £0.25m worth of commercial contracts had been secured. This would not have been achievable without the Council funding, which provided a stable infrastructure.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Patel for the work he was doing and for providing an informative presentation.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the presentation be noted; and
- (2) the booklet outlining a brief summary of benefits available, which helps Councils know when to refer

Strategic Director  
- Environment

clients to the Citizens Advice Bureau, be circulated to Members of the Board for information.

#### ELS15 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Health and Community outlining the contribution that the Community Development Service had made in the delivery of the Cultural and Leisure Service plan and the five key corporate priorities over the last year. The report outlined a summary of achievements in the year 2005 – 2006 and provided information in respect of Community Development and starter grants, as well as voluntary youth organisation grants and bursaries for young people.

The Board considered that a tremendous amount of work was being carried out and praised the service for its excellent work.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report be noted; and
- (2) the Community Annual Reports be placed in the Members' Rooms at Runcorn and Widnes.

Strategic Director  
– Health and  
Community

#### ELS16 CITY EMPLOYMENT STRATEGIES

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Environment regarding the recent Government City Employment Strategies Initiative, the concept of which had been included in “A New Deal for Welfare: Empowering People to Work” published in January 2006.

Recently, the Government had issued more details on this and had invited local authorities that had the worst worklessness problems to bid to become national “City Employment Strategy” pilots. The concept was that local consortia were formed of public, private and voluntary sectors which would work together to target those wards with the highest levels of worklessness. Consortia groups were about co-operation rather than setting up separate stand alone regeneration companies.

It was reported that the Merseyside Authorities had suggested that a collective bid be made. The timescale was very short and guidance had been issued late. Initially, it was understood that a new Deprived Areas Funding (DAF) programme would provide circa £80,000 per ward towards this work for the period October 2006 – March 2008 to be

spent in the identified wards. However, it was now anticipated that funding could be substantially less than this. In addition, in the first year, funds were to be used by Job Centre Plus, not the Consortium.

The Board was advised that a business plan was to be produced to show how a reduction of unemployment in the wards identified could be achieved, with any “enabling measures” outlined. A working group was to be organised to help achieve this with Merseyside Employers’ Coalition to take the lead. It was anticipated that further information would be available at this meeting; however, funding could now be as low as £15 - £20,000 per ward.

The Board considered how this funding could best be utilised and achieve significant changes. Suggestions included:

- appointing a human resources expert to assist public agencies in removing requirements from job specifications which excluded certain people from being considered; and
- building on existing initiatives within New Deal and the One Stop Shop, so adding value.

It was noted that similar work had been carried out by a Working Group 12 – 18 months ago and the information from this exercise could be utilised.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) information from previous work carried out be circulated to Members of the Board together with an action plan update on the New Deal and One Stop Shop Strategies;
- (2) a further report be submitted to the Board following the first meeting of the Working Group; and
- (3) the statistical work done by Wirral Borough Council be mailed to each Member of the Board.

Strategic Director  
- Environment

## ELS17 QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORTS

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy regarding the First Quarter Monitoring Reports for the Economic Regeneration and Culture and Leisure Services. A number of performance considerations were outlined in the appendix to the report.

The Board discussed the following issues:

- Halton Borough Council had retained Ticketmaster status; however, its policy was to only have one outlet in the Borough and so this was to be retained in Runcorn, which was where the public were used to going due to the Tourist Information Centre;
- The North West Development Agency had accepted the principle that Halton Direct Link (HDL) could use the Tourist Information branding. The new way of working would see HDL providing routine responses for information; more complex questions would be passed over to the promotions and tourism team.
- The difficulty in obtaining correct figures from the Learning Skills Council.
- Work was progressing well on the athletic track.
- It was intended that the Library Service be extended to Saturdays and more hours in the evening. In addition, stocks were to be reviewed to determine their appropriateness. There was an intention to attend the next round of Area Forum meetings in order to consult the local public.
- A Conservation Plan was being carried out at Halton Castle, paid for by Heritage Lottery funding. Issues being looked at included maintenance and access. It was noted that there had been strong evidence to suggest that the Castle originated in the Iron Age. There was to be an "Open Day" on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2006 in the morning in the meeting rooms at the public house and the bid was to be submitted before the end of March 2007 as Halton Borough Council was a priority area in terms of funding until that time.
- The tennis lease was almost finalised between the Club, the Council and the Diocese, and work was to start in the near future.
- A Local Enterprise Growth Initiative Bid was

being worked on in order to boost the number of companies in the Borough to bring it up to the national average.

The Chairman asked that Ms. Anne Bryant be commended for her consistently good work.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

*Meeting ended at 8.55 p.m.*