

EMPLOYMENT, LEARNING AND SKILLS POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Employment, Learning and Skills Policy and Performance Board on Monday, 13 November 2006 at the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Lewis

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: L. Cairns, H. Cockcroft, G. Collins, N. Goodwin, A. Villiers, L. Holland and S. Saunders

Also in attendance: Ms. D. Dalby, Mr. F. Noon, Mr. H. Patel

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

	<i>Action</i>
ELS18 MINUTES	
The minutes of the meeting held on 11 th September 2006, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a correct record.	
ELS19 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME	
It was noted that no questions had been received.	
ELS20 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES	
It was confirmed that the Council had not been short-listed for the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative. Only thirteen authorities had been selected nationally, which was less than the number that had previously been advised. Feedback on the Authority's submission was expected at the end of January 2007.	
RESOLVED: That the minutes be received.	
ELS21 ADULT LEARNING PRESENTATION	
The Board received a presentation from Ms. Siobhan	

Saunders, Head of Adult Learning and Skills Development, regarding adult learning in the Borough.

Ms. Saunders outlined:

- the structure of the division;
- the remit of the team;
- funding for the service, which equated to an overall revenue income for 06/07 (on an academic year basis) of approximately £888,000;
- an overview of the external inspection;
- the post inspection action plan, a copy of which was tabled for information; and
- issues for the team.

Members considered a variety of issues including the following:

- attempts being made to encourage men to participate in services offered, for example by providing IT type courses and family courses, which had resulted in a gradual increase;
- the “train to gain” project which attempted to improve basic skills up to level 2 in a particular field to help to tackle the views expressed by employers that certain skills were lacked by the workforce;
- the inability of the service to claim back extra funding to cover those people on benefits who participated in courses;
- research previously undertaken by Pion Economics, refined further by additional research undertaken earlier this year, identified problems and areas to be addressed and enabled the Authority to inform the Learning Skills Council where there were shortages;
- difficulties due to the Learning Skills Council not being locally accountable – it was noted that although there was now a new area team for Halton, the new Area Manager, who was supposed to be dedicated to Halton, had been seconded on a part-time basis to Sefton Council;
- limited Neighbourhood Renewal and priorities fund meant that the Authority could target specific areas to help bridge gaps that existed; however, Neighbourhood Renewal and European funding ceased in 2008 at which time the Authority would lose a large slice of the current programmes provided;
- the impact on children of family situations and the parents’ outlook on learning.

The Chairman thanked Ms Saunders for an

informative presentation.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the presentation be noted;
- (2) the Adult Learning Topic Group consider the issues raised during debate, in particular:
 - (a) the high number of people that have literacy and numeracy problems;
 - (b) the barriers specific to Halton;
 - (c) lobbying the Learning and Skills Council on the use and distribution of funding, including the contracting process; and
 - (d) how people can be motivated to improve their skills.

ELS22 VOLUNTARY SECTOR GRANTS

The Board received a presentation from Ms. D. Dalby, Chief Executive of Halton Voluntary Action (HVA), regarding the HVA's work and contribution to Halton's priorities.

Ms. Dalby provided the following information:

- an overview of the services and support provided to local groups and organisations that worked within the voluntary sector;
- recent achievements;
- the current environment, for example in relation to the recent dramatic changes to European funding and changes to statutory relationships;
- structure and housekeeping issues;
- future options, for example to carry on as the organisation currently did or to join with a neighbouring council for voluntary services; and
- new constitutional changes.

The Board considered a variety of issues including the following:

- training, which was provided free of charge;
- funding ramifications and the need for HVA to consider a variety of options such as partnership working and sharing resources;
- other funding sources apart from the Council which included Central Government, ERDF, EU Social Fund and the Lottery;
- the fact that money was targeted at very specific

- headings;
- the fact that the building lease was to be relinquished the following year and lessons learnt in respect of refurbishing a privately-owned building;
 - the impact of Value Added Tax (VAT) on groups – Ms. Dalby reported that an accountant had been advising groups about book-keeping and VAT registering benefits, although this post was funded through the Government and so would only be available until the end of March;
 - work was ongoing with each group to look at their policies in respect of CRB checks; it was advised that this requirement had meant that a number of volunteering placements had dried up.

The Chairman thanked Ms. Dalby for an informative presentation.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be noted.

ELS23 ANNUAL REPORT FOR VOLUNTARY SECTOR FUNDING

The Board received the Annual Report for Voluntary Sector Funding, which looked at the benefits to Halton from funding to the voluntary sector for 2005/2006.

The report outlined a background in terms of the national perspective and the Council's response to this, an outline of external funding accessed by organisations receiving core funding and a number of organisation profiles.

Members considered the way these groups were funded and an analysis of how outcomes were monitored. It was noted that anybody that received over £5,000 had a service level agreement.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

ELS24 ENTERPRISE TOPIC ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Board received a report from the Strategic Director – Environment providing a briefing on progress of the Enterprise Topic Group Action Plan, which had been established to look at skills issues in the Borough. The appendix to the report detailed the action plan and provided an update on progress made.

In addition, Mr. Frank Noon attended the meeting to outline the work he was undertaking with young people who were experiencing difficulties within the education system,

teaching them skills such as plumbing and joinery. Mr. Noon supported several local schools including St. Peter and Paul, Halton High and St. Chads, and the very successful team consisted of ex-teachers who were highly qualified.

The company dealt with the type of young person who would not normally access a college education and who was “disaffected” from school life for whatever reason. The young people were engaged in an informal atmosphere and, as well as reintegrating them and providing them with lifelong skills, they also carried out a number of tasks that were of benefit to the society at large; for example, a group had recently revitalised a plot at Haddocks Wood used by people who had had strokes or had serious therapy issues.

Mr. Noon confirmed he worked with boys and girls from years 10 and 11, and he was based at Haddocks Wood. Fifteen young people per day could be accommodated and this was funded by the school at a rate of £41 per pupil per day. Mr. Noon confirmed he was looking to expand his business but was not driven to do so; the aim was to get youngsters to engage and have a positive outlook and better self-image to improve their attitude so that they were equipped with basic needs that were incidental skills most people learnt as a matter of course.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Noon for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED: That progress on the action plan be noted.

ELS25 STANDING ORDER 51

The Board was reminded that Standing Order 51 of the Council’s Constitution stated that meetings should not continue beyond 9.00 pm.

RESOLVED: That Standing Order 51 be waived.

ELS26 EMPLOYMENT TOPIC ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Environment regarding the Employment Topic Group action plan. The appendix to the report detailed the action plan and provided an update on progress.

It was noted that the one area that had made no progress at all was the establishment of high street jobs shops as, at this time, the cost of such shops was seen as

prohibitively expensive.

RESOLVED: That progress on the action plan be noted.

ELS27 SKILLS TOPIC ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Environment providing a briefing on progress of the skills topic group action plans as outlined at Appendix one.

It was noted that, in summary, reasonable progress had been made in terms of skills. In terms of influencing Government about seeking achievement and progression, these messages were now being made by many skills-based organisations and there were increasing signs that this was acknowledged. However, there was little tangible progress in this filtering down to changes in what was being delivered.

Of real concern were the continued budget reductions for the work of the adult learning team that had amounted to some 6.5%, although it was acknowledged that some nearby boroughs had had much bigger reductions.

RESOLVED: That progress on the action plan be noted.

ELS28 EMPLOYMENT, LEARNING AND SKILLS SPECIALIST STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

It was agreed that this item be deferred to the next meeting.

ELS29 CAPITAL OF CULTURE

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Health and Community providing an update on Liverpool's Capital of Culture Programme for 2008.

Two documents were tabled outlining annual events, which were already established on Liverpool's cultural calendar, and an additional programme. It was noted that this was not comprehensive as the programme for 2008 continued to develop and expand. Further announcements would be made throughout 2007 as specific events and new season details were finalised.

The Operational Director – Cultural Services

confirmed that, in addition to local plans, work was on-going to involve the Authority as much as possible in the raft of events listed.

RESOLVED: That the update be received.

ELS30 QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORTS

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy regarding the 2nd quarter monitoring reports for the Economic Regeneration, and Cultural and Leisure Services. A number of performance considerations were outlined in the appendix to the report.

The Board discussed the following issues:

- a strategy to tackle worklessness – it was confirmed that news was still awaited in respect of deprived areas funding;
- Learning Skills Council Adult Plan for Halton – a working draft, which was originally to have been issued in September, was now anticipated to be 12 months away.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Meeting ended at 9.24 p.m.