

EMPLOYMENT, LEARNING AND SKILLS POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Employment, Learning and Skills Policy and Performance Board on Monday, 12 March 2007 at the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillor M Ratcliffe

Absence declared on Council business: Councillor Findon

Officers present: G. Collins, N. Goodwin, A. Villiers and L. Derbyshire

Also in attendance: (none)

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

ELS39 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 29th January 2007, having been printed and circulated were signed as a correct record.

ELS40 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

It was noted that no questions had been received.

ELS41 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES

The minutes of the Executive Board relating to the work of the Employment, Learning and Skills Policy Performance Board were submitted for information.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.

ELS42 CAPITAL OF CULTURE

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Health and Community which:-

- (1) gave the Members an update on Halton's involvement in Liverpool's Capital of Culture

celebrations; and

- (2) sought approval to endorse Halton's programme of activities, in particular the proposal to host a major Youth Cultural Festival in 2008, and its budgeting implications.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were noted:-

- that there would be a shortfall in the budget in relation to the Youth Cultural Festival event. However, 30% of the costs had already been identified. It was acknowledged that the potential shortfall in the funding would be significantly reduced with further sponsorship;
- The Youth Culture Festival in 2008 at which all Merseyside Authorities and their twin towns would be invited to participate would create an exciting opportunity for Halton to engage with the young people and the community. The event would focus on performance opportunities for young people and would be supported by the Merseyside Cultural Forum. The event would also allow a real opportunity for the young people of Merseyside to get together and to celebrate what they do;
- Halton in April 2007 would be hosting the European Student Rugby League Games as part of the Capital of Culture Programme. This was a nine day event from Sunday 1st April – Monday 9th April 2007 and would provide numerous opportunities for the Borough. Accommodation for the visitors had also been secured. The last European Cup had been held in Moscow and it was acknowledged that a number of young people in Halton were involved every year in the cup as coaches and players;
- The Borough had recently staged a very successful National Students Rugby League Championships. The Rugby League had congratulated Halton on the championships announcing that they had proved to be the best that had been held in relation to organisation and venues etc. Halton

Farnworth Hornets had also been nominated for club of the year to the Council for Physical Recreation; and

- A Capital of Culture Enterprise Game for 2008 had been endorsed by the Merseyside Culture Forum.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the comments raised be noted;
- (2) the Board recommend that the Executive Board give support to a major Youth Cultural Festival being hosted in Halton in 2008; and
- (3) a report be sent to the Executive Board regarding the 2008 Youth Festival advocating that the Council underwrites the cost, such underwriting being reduced as sponsorship is secured.

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ELS43 CITY EMPLOYMENT STRATEGIES

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Environment that provided an update on the Liverpool City Region Employment Strategy.

The Board was advised that the concept of the City Employment Strategies (CES) 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 i.e. worklessness above 25% of working age population. In Halton, the Department of Work and Pensions had identified Windmill Hill, Castlefields, Riverside, Halton Lea, Grange and Kingsway.

The Board was further advised that a draft Business Plan had been submitted to the Department of Work and Pensions and a formal response was awaited. The Department of Work and Pensions had clarified the Deprived Areas Fund (DAF) budget that was available. Until the end of March 2007, £1.4m had been identified to start the CES programme. Due to the late release of the funding, it was not possible for Job Centre Plus to commission any main programmes or spend the allocation. As a result, it was being used as a flexible fund to assist people into work. Anyone living in the DAF wards could access up to £250 if it could be proved that it would help them secure employment.

It was highlighted that there was still a lack of clarity with regard to the requested enabling measures that the partnership had submitted. Enabling measures were requests to change rules and procedures in order to improve services and outcomes. The Government was looking at all such requests nationally through a series of working groups. However, progress had been slow.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were noted:-

- The Government funding, in the first year incorporated staffing costs but in the second year these costs would have to be identified from alternative funds.
- The issues relating to the lack of enabling measures was noted;
- That the funding comprised of two allocations of £4.2m for each of the two years 2007 and 2008/09 for the six authorities which represents approximately £67,000 per identified ward. The consortium, once set up, would control the spending of Deprived Areas Funding. It was anticipated that the consortium would comprise of representatives from the six local authorities, Job Centre Plus and the Learning Skills Council;
- It was agreed that regular update reports on the progress of the CES be presented to the Board;
- It was acknowledged that employers would value the re-focus and expansion of measures such as worked based mentors, Skills Passports and Skills Escalators;
- The barriers to people not gaining employment and the survey that had been commissioned to gain further information on this matter was noted;
- The national programme for work based skills development 'Train to Gain' was discussed and noted;
- The apprenticeships framework and the issues relating to funding and the limitations in respect of age etc were noted. It was also acknowledged that flexible apprenticeships were required for the 25 + age group in order to give more mature people the

opportunity to train in another career such as plumbing etc. The process for obtaining funding for such apprenticeships was also discussed and noted;

- The issues and implications relating to the lack of consistency in funding mechanisms and frequent changes to the rules for such funding was noted;
- It was suggested that the new funding allocation could be publicised at the Area Forum meetings and they could also be used to allocate the available funding to the appropriate wards, although this would need to be considered further as not all wards are covered by the available funding; and
- The issues and problems arising from obtaining a pension on retirement was noted. It was also suggested that issues relating to retirement pensions could be considered by the Board in the future; and
- The work previously developed through topic groups was considered relevant and should be fed into the CES process.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report and comments raised be noted;
- (2) appropriate funding from the CES be allocated as follows:-
 - (i) to increase the emphasis on literacy and numeracy in the Borough;
 - (ii) to deliver adult learning programmes within the locality for the more mature individual which will give flexibilities of choice for a new career;
 - (iii) an analysis be undertaken to identify the number of unemployed mature people in the Borough that would benefit from a new career;
 - (iv) to enable the development of funding mechanisms, flexibilities and consistency of programmes such as student grants;

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- (3) selective Area Forum meetings be used to promote the new funding and feedback from the meetings be reported back to the Board;
- (4) action plans that had been developed by previous Working groups be considered to identify opportunities to utilise the new funding;
- (5) regular updates on the progress of the CES be presented to the Board.

(NB: Councillors Stockton and E Cargill declared a personal interest in the following item of business, due to being Directors of Murdishaw Community Centre).

ELS44 COMMUNITY CENTRES UPDATE

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Health and Community which advised the Members of the contribution that the Community Centres Service had made to the delivery of the Culture and Leisure Service Plan and the five key corporate priorities during the last year.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were noted:-

- The key achievements over the last year were noted;
- The comparative usage and the fall in the usage at some of the Runcorn centres and the possible reasons for the decline was noted. It was suggested that a detailed analysis of the specific activities undertaken in the five different sites be undertaken; and
- The success of Country Garden Services in Murdishaw Community Centre and the possible expansion of the service to other areas of the Borough, were appropriate, was noted.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report and comments raised be noted;
- (2) a detailed analysis of the specific activities undertaken in the five different sites be undertaken; and
- (3) the Board support the wherever possible,

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possible expansion of the Country Garden Service across the Borough.

ELS45 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 for 20 minutes.

ELS46 COMMUNITY COHESION IN HALTON

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate & Policy that provided a comprehensive briefing on the progress of the Community Cohesion scrutiny topic.

The report requested the view on a series of questions relating to community cohesion in Halton.

In this respect, a CD containing all the data related to the review was available at the meeting.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were noted:-

- The complexity and the range of inter related matters that community cohesion issues impacted on was discussed and noted. It was also noted that such issues had an economic, social and cultural impact on the community;
- The work that the working group had undertaken to date was discussed and noted;
- The difficulties and the reasons for the difficulties in obtaining definitive statistics to address some of the issues was noted;
- The value of voluntary services such as CAB was noted. It was also noted that some organisations had difficulties in paying for the rent in the Councils community centres. The suggestion to reduce/remove rent to such organisations in Council Community Centres could be considered and the organisations could also be given the opportunity to opt into the Council's training programmes;
- In relation to Question 1 in paragraph 3.6 – What is

the best and most appropriate definition for community cohesion in Halton? After considerable debate the following suggestions were supported by Members of the Board to be considered by the working group:-

- (i) “Community Cohesion maybe defined as striving to ensure that all Halton residents and migrant workers feel socially included, integrated and valued and that they have a stake in the success of their community in which they live and work to be certain that it happens;” and
 - (ii) “ Togetherness”;
- In relation to the other questions in paragraph 3.6 of the report, it was suggested that Halton’s Community Strategy ensures that it adequately deals with issues relating to community cohesion. It was also noted that community cohesion would need to be included in service planning and monitoring in the same way as equality and diversity; and
 - It was agreed that an update report on the discussion points and suggestions for the definition of community cohesion be presented to the next meeting of the Board.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the progress on the action plan and comments raised be noted:
- (2) an update report on the discussion points and suggestions for the definition of community cohesion be presented to the next meeting of the Board; and
- (3) the Council should consider helping the Voluntary sector by:-
 - Not charging rent or services charges for its buildings;
 - Not charging for standard services such as emptying bins;

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- Working with voluntary groups to become a procurement partner so that they may benefit from the economy of scale that the Council has when placing large orders; and
- Providing the voluntary sector with free places on Council Training Courses.

ELS47 PERFORMING MONITORING REPORTS - QUARTER 3

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy regarding the 3rd 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.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Meeting ended at 9.20 p.m.