

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

*At a meeting of the Employment, Learning and Skills, and Community Policy and Performance Board on Wednesday, 7 January 2015 in the The Board Room - Municipal Building, Widnes*

Present: Councillors Edge (Chairman), MacManus (Vice-Chairman), Howard, P. Lloyd Jones, Parker, Ratcliffe and Joe Roberts

Apologies for Absence: Councillors S. Baker and Logan

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: W Rourke, A. Jones, C. Dinsdale, P. Garnett, D. Houghton, C. Patino and J. Unsworth

Also in attendance: Councillor E Jones in accordance with Standing Order number 33.

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

*Action*

#### **ELS29 MINUTES**

The Minutes from the meeting held on 10 November 2014, were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

#### **ELS30 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

The Board was advised that no public questions had been received.

#### **ELS31 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES**

The Board considered the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Board relevant to the Employment, Learning and Skills, and Communities Portfolio, since the last meeting of the Board.

REDOLVED: That the minutes be noted.

#### **ELS32 PRESENTATION UNIVERSAL CREDIT**

The Board received a presentation from the Council's Revenue and Benefits and Customer Services Division on

the introduction of the Universal Credit Scheme.

Members were advised that Universal Credit was a single payment for people who were looking for work or were on low incomes. It was introduced in 2013 on a pilot basis but went live in Halton on 17 November 2014 and replaced the following payments:

- Income based Jobseeker's Allowance;
- Income related Employment and Support Allowance;
- Income Support;
- Child Tax Credits;
- Working Tax Credits; and
- Housing Benefit.

Officers advised that applications for Universal Credit (UC) were made online and that the Council provided support to assist claimants with this in the Halton Direct Links (HDL's).

Assistance was also provided to claimants with Personal Budgeting Support (PBS) which assisted with the three key changes: a single household payment; being paid monthly; and rent being paid directly to the claimant, and advised on the problems that may occur because of these, such as debt management, household budgeting, tenancy issues etc. Support was also provided to the UC Service Centre on housing issues.

The following points of clarification were noted following Members' questions:

- Welfare Rights was now an in-house service;
- The HDL staff who assisted claimants with form filling-in were trained by the DWP staff; and
- People without bank accounts were referred to the DWP for assistance;
- Members requested a copy of the Officer's presentation which would be sent to them.

RESOLVED: That the presentation and action points be noted.

*Councillor Peter Lloyd Jones declared a Discloseable Other Interest in the following item as he was a Board Member of Murdishaw Centre.*

## ELS33 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT - ANNUAL REPORT

The Strategic Director – Communities, presented the annual report on the Community Development service delivery for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014.

The report explained that Community Development supported the creation, development and sustainability of independent local community groups, which in turn generated the capacity for effective and inclusive community engagement with Council departments and services, thus enabling the delivery on many hundreds of community initiatives to tackle strategic objectives and community needs.

It was noted that Ward Members received quarterly briefings and annual reports on Community Development activities across the Borough. The report went on to provide some examples of neighbourhood activity within each of the 7 Local Area Forum areas:

- Broadheath, Ditton, Hough Green and Hale;
- Appleton, Kingsway and Riverside;
- Birchfield, Farnworth and Halton View;
- Grange, Heath, Halton Brook and Mersey;
- Halton Castle, Norton North and South and Windmill Hill;
- Beechwood and Halton Lea; and
- Daresbury.

Members were also advised that a service evaluation was carried out annually by the Council's Customer Intelligence Unit with a 45% return rate. Out of these it was noted that 100% of the respondents would recommend the service to other groups. Snapshots of responses received were included in the report.

It was reported that the Community Development service also administered grants for Starter, Community Development and Voluntary Youth grants as discussed in the report, and a breakdown of expenditure was presented in tables.

The key supporting role of the Community Development service was noted by Members, particularly with regards to the Health and Wellbeing agenda and Local Area Forum support. The strategic approach to community engagement in Halton at partnership level was welcomed and Members wished to convey their thanks to the Team.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

#### ELS34 SCRUTINY TOPIC GROUP ITEMS

The Board received a report from the Strategic Director, Children and Enterprise, which proposed the establishment of two topic groups as follows:

- Topic Group 1 – to evaluate Halton’s Inward Investment Service within the context of an emerging Liverpool City Region Inward Investment model.
- Topic Group 2 – to consider potential income generation and efficiency savings relating to budgets set aside for Employment, Learning and Skills.

An explanation of the remits and scopes of the proposed Topic Groups was provided in the report for Members’ consideration.

Councillor Jones – Portfolio holder for Economic Development, advised the Board that the Council’s Employment, Learning and Skills (ELS) Division had experienced several reviews by the Council’s Efficiency Board. The last one had concluded in January 2014 resulting in a major restructure of the Division. Furthermore, with the exception of the Divisional Manager post, the functions and services provided by the Division were solely externally funded.

After taking Councillor Jones’ and other comments by Board Members into consideration, Members agreed that it may be more appropriate to focus on income generation and the deployment of the organisation’s resources. However, a Member pointed out that there was a potential to duplicate the income generation area, as this was currently being reviewed by the Corporate Policy and Performance Board, under the ‘Fees and Charges’ topic group, which had already been established.

Given the uncertainty surrounding the intended role and remit of the second Topic Group, it was suggested that in the first instance, Officers would provide an analysis of the types of income and funding that could be drawn down by the ELS Division in the coming months. This would be presented at the next PPB meeting and Members could then decide whether or not to progress Topic Group 2. In the meantime Members agreed that the Groups could be set up and chaired as follows:

- Topic Group 1 – Councillor Sue Edge; and
- Topic Group 2 – Councillor Andrew MacManus

Members would be emailed for their preference of which group they would like to join.

RESOLVED: That the Board:

- 1) agrees to the establishment of the Topic Group 1 mentioned above;
- 2) agrees that further information on income and funding of the ELS Division to be provided at the next meeting;
- 3) agrees, in the interim, to the appointment of the Chairmen as mentioned above and Members to confirm their group preference via email on which to join; and
- 4) agrees that any interim reports would be presented to the Employment, Learning and Skills, and Communities PPB, no later than June 2015.

Strategic Director  
- Children and  
Enterprise

#### ELS35 CITIES, GROWTH AND POVERTY – JOSEPH ROWNTREE FOUNDATION

The Board received a report from the Strategic Director – Children and Enterprise, which provided an overview of the key findings from the recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation Report '*Cities, Growth and Poverty: Evidence Review*' which examined the relationship between economic growth and poverty.

The report stated that there was a consensus that cities were important for economic growth. The Government was devolving powers to the largest and fastest growing urban areas and providing incentives to encourage growth. A set of 'City Deals' had been agreed and the prospective Single Local Growth Fund would give cities more control over local spending in areas such as skills, transport and European development funds.

It was reported that many cities also had high levels of poverty, placing considerable strain on public services, for which local authorities and other agencies faced an increasing demand at a time of unprecedented funding cuts.

The key findings from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Report were presented in the Officer's report

and links to the document were provided for further reading.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

ELS36 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORTS - QUARTER 2  
2014/15

The Board was presented with the performance management reports for quarter 2 of 2014/15 and were requested to consider and raise any questions or points of clarification in respect of these.

It was noted that key priorities for development or improvement in 2014-17 were agreed by Members and included in Directorate Plans, for the various functional areas reporting to the Board as follows:

- Enterprise, Employment and Skills; and
- Community and Environment.

The reports detailed progress against service objectives and milestones, and performance targets and provided information relating to key developments and emerging issues that had arisen during the period. In addition, Appendix 1 of the report contained a progress update concerning the implementation of all Directorate high-risk mitigation measures that were relevant to the remit of this Board.

Arising from Members' queries, the following was noted:

- The conversion rate of Inward Investment Enquiries was welcomed; Members requested to know how this compared nationally;
- With regards to the Inward Investment Enquiries that chose not to 'convert', Members enquired if there was any feedback from them. Officers would advise at the next meeting;
- The success of the provision of Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) since the introduction of free meals for all reception, year 1 and year 2 children was welcomed; it was commented that the new school set ups would contribute towards improving profitability;
- Officers would submit a more detailed report to the Board in the future regarding the school meals

provision;

- Following the Library review, the Council was hopeful that no compulsory redundancies would be made; and
- The efforts made by the Stadium regarding advising Club members of the opening of the new Club were welcomed.

RESOLVED: That the second quarter performance management reports be received.

Strategic Director  
- Children and  
Enterprise

*Meeting ended at 8.00 p.m.*