

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EMPLOYMENT LEARNING, SKILLS & COMMUNITY POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

JUNE 2021 – MARCH 2022

Introduction from Councillor Eddie Jones

Chair of the Employment Learning, Skills & Community Policy & Performance Board

The Board scrutinises the work of the *Economy, Enterprise & Property Department* and the *Community & Environment Department*.

My thanks the officers for working with me and the Vice-Chair to develop the agenda items and the quality of the reports and presentations they have produced during the year. Board members also thanked officers at meetings for the work they were doing to cope with the pandemic and maintain services.

I hope that the Board will continue to make a worthwhile contribution to creating an economically prosperous borough in this challenging environment.

THE BOARDS' MEMBERSHIP

During 2020/21, the Board's membership comprised Councillor Eddie Jones (Chair) Councillor Ellen Cargill (Vice-Chair); Councillor Victoria Begg; Councillor Marjorie Bradshaw; Councillor Eddie Dourley; Councillor Stan Hill; Councillor Geoffrey Logan; Councillor Carol Plumpton Walsh; Councillor Tom Stretch; Councillor Aimee Teeling; Councillor Louise Whitley.

The Board had 3 meetings during the year.

THE ROLE OF THE BOARD

The Council's constitution sets out the Board's strategic priority is to develop policy and scrutinise performance in relation to the Council's objectives. Specifically in relation to 4 areas:

- Enterprise and employment
- Adult learning and skills
- Culture and leisure services
- Library Service

PRESENTATION CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAU

The Board received a presentation from the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), regarding activities that the Organisation was delivering in Halton. The PPB was advised that CAB is as an independent organisation set up as a Charity in 1949. They specialise in providing information and advice to assist people with legal matters, benefits, debt, consumer matters, immigration, housing and homelessness, employment and employment training, budgeting and child protection.

The CAB is a free, confidential and impartial service.

DWP RESTART PROGRAMME

The PPB received information regarding the introduction of the Government's Restart Programme which was announced at the Spending Review in November 2020. The Restart Programme provides intensive and tailored support to unemployed people and Members were advised that the Council's Employment, Learning and Skills (ELS) Division would deliver the Programme on a sub-contractor basis. Members received details on the contract including income and expenditure costs. The Programme offered 'Payment by Results' which were received upon the achievement of sustained job outcomes. So providers would be incentivised to help as many people as possible into sustained employment - the more people helped to sustain employment the more outcome payments received.

UPDATE BUSINESS IMPROVEMENTS AND GROWTH TEAM

This item gave an update on key activities being undertaken and / or overseen by the Council's Business Improvement and Growth Team during the Covid-19 pandemic. Since March 2020, most of the Team had been working on supporting local businesses during the pandemic and activities had been changed to reflect this. Some generic business support had continued but via the Growth Platform; and the One Front Door concept.

BUSINESS GROWTH PROGRAMME

Members received an update on the Business Growth Programme (BGP), which was being undertaken by the Council's Business Improvement Growth Team. Most of the Team had been working on supporting local businesses during the pandemic and activities had been changed to reflect this. However, the BGP was one of the service areas that had been protected and continued in its current form. It was reported that the BGP had been supporting Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) that delivered Business to Business, across the Halton Region since January 2013. As part of the Liverpool City Region's (LCR) Growth Hub Programme, it supported businesses by offering fully funded specialist support through ERDF and Council funding.

BOROUGH OF CULTURE

The Board received an update on the Borough of Culture project.

It was reported that the award of Liverpool City Region Borough of Culture was inspired by the UK City of Culture programme that followed Liverpool's European Capital of Culture in 2008. The new initiative launched in 2018 as Liverpool celebrated its 10 Anniversary as the UK's only European Capital of Culture.

The Borough of culture was a non-competitive process that rotated around the City Region with the aim of encouraging each Borough to collaboratively develop its local talent and potential, whilst reflecting the ambitions and aims of the Regional Culture and Creativity strategy, which looked to build sustainable capacity across the City Region. The report outlined the aims of the programme and the five key elements being weaved into the creativity programme. It also highlighted the aims of Halton's Borough of Culture year. The operational side of the programme, the Celebrate Halton Programme (appended to the report) and aspects relating to funding and marketing were also presented in the report.

RIVERSIDE COLLEGE

In September, the Board welcomed the Principal from Riverside College, Mary Murphy, who presented an update on the College's strategic priorities; this included the quality of teaching and learning; enrolments; funding; and key developments. The presentation outlined the type of students and areas where they were being educated – 16-18 year olds, those with special educational needs, adults, higher education, apprenticeships and fee paying courses.

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT

Members received a presentation on the work the Economy, Enterprise and Property Department had completed on a Halton Economic Assessment. The Assessment had considered the following categories:

The Economic Overview;
Enterprise and Jobs;
The Resident Population;
Skills;
Land, Infrastructure and Transport.

The report outlined the key findings of progress in the economy within the following areas:

Economic Value (GVA) and Growth;
Employment and Economic Activity;
Skills;
Economic Inactivity and Unemployment;
Housing; and
Land and Property Markets.

Members received an update on the borough's Welcome Back Programme. This is funding that Council's received to build on the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund in 2020.

The presentation outlined how, in line with the grant criteria, the funding had been used in Halton to meet the following activity strands:

1. Support to develop an action plan for the safe reopening of local economies
2. Communications and public information
3. Business facing awareness raising activities
4. Temporary public realm changes to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely
5. Support and promote a safe public environment for a local area's visitor economy
6. Allow local areas to develop plans for responding to the medium term impact of CV-19 including trialling new ideas particularly where these relate to the High Street.

LIBRARY SERVICES

An update on the Library Service was provided.

During the pandemic all library buildings were closed to the public and staff and many activities were moved to digital platforms. Members were advised on social media

campaigns used to engage audiences and highlight digital resources to new and existing customers.

Members discussed the challenges and constraints of delivering the Service as it recovered from the impacts of the pandemic. They also noted the positive response from the public and that the fact that the library service was still greatly valued in the community. It was also noted that schools had restarted their visits.

APPRENTICESHIP SUPPORT

Members were advised that the Apprenticeship Support (AS) by the Be More Team was a delivery partner, managed by Halton's Employment, Learning and Skills Division. The service provided free information, advice and guidance (IAG) about apprenticeships to schools, young people, parents and residents. The report provided discussed the current service delivery outputs in relation to the delivery of promotional events on apprenticeships and one to one support, and advice and guidance interventions provided to residents.

It also advised on how the IAG sessions were moved to virtual platforms during the Covid-19 pandemic, to enable the continuation of the service. Additionally, the report outlined forthcoming events and projects planned this year and the progress made in updating the Be More portal. It was hoped that the portal would be relaunched in May 2022.

PERFORMANCE REPORTING

At each meeting the Board receive this report that informs them of emerging issues and the performance of the divisions in meeting Key Performance Indicators. The latter feed out of the annual business plan which in turn is derived from a longer term Council level plan.