

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board

**DATE:** 4<sup>th</sup> December 2008

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director – Children & Young People

**SUBJECT:** Proposals for a Greater Merseyside Sub Regional Grouping to Plan and Commission 16-18 Learning and Commissioning Arrangements

**WARD(S)** Borough-wide

**1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 Recommendation of a Sub Regional Grouping within which Halton Council can discharge its future statutory responsibilities for planning and commissioning 16-18 Learning. This as part of the transfer of responsibilities from the Learning & Skills Council in April 2010.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:**

- i) Executive Board approves Halton's membership of a Greater Merseyside Sub Regional Group for 16-18 learning, in order to comply with the Council's responsibilities arising from the transfer of Learning & Skills Council (LSC) duties for 16-18 learning to the Council in 2010.
- ii) To maximise the benefits to all learners Executive Board requests that the Greater Merseyside Group ensures that there is coordination of strategic planning for 16-18 learners with all neighbouring authorities.
- iii) Executive Board approves 'Model Three' for Sub-Regional Commissioning. Local Authorities come together to share plans for 14-19 but procure providers from within our own Council areas.

**3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 The Government has announced its intention to route funding for 16-18 year old learning through Councils following the winding up of the LSC. The LSC will be replaced in 2010 by two new agencies; the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). The changes are subject to legislation, and outlined in the White Paper "Raising Expectations". Part of the transitional arrangements is to establish sub-regional groupings of Councils who

will coordinate commissioning for 16-18 learning across the appropriate area.

- 3.2 Locally, these new responsibilities will be coordinated under the auspices of Halton's 14-19 Strategic Partnership. This Partnership brings all stakeholders together to plan all 14-19 learning in the Borough and will ensure that the full breadth of provision to meet the 2013 entitlement is in place for Halton's learners.
- 3.3 There is significant preparatory work required to ensure the Council is ready to assume the lead commissioning role for 16-18 learning in 2010. This will involve:
- Establishing Sub Regional Groupings of Councils for 16-18 commissioning (the subject of this report);
  - Shadowing the LSC in 2009/10 as a 'tracking year' for all Councils to fully understand planning and commissioning cycles for Post 16;
  - Coordination of LSC changes within Building Schools for the Future and Further Education College investment;
  - Introduction of new courses including changes to A Levels and 17 new Diplomas
  - The raising of the participation age from 16 – 18
  - Meeting the diverse needs of all learners in the borough
- 3.4 The recommendation of a Greater Merseyside Sub Regional Grouping for 16-18 is on the basis of:
- Alignment with the Greater Merseyside Connexions Service boundary;
  - Alignment with the developing Liverpool City Region and the Multi Area Agreement;
  - Current 'Travel to Learn' patterns for 16-18 year olds in the sub-region.
  - Working collectively to reduce young people Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) and raising numbers of learners with Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications in the Borough.
  - Additional sub sub regional groupings including a St Helens Warrington Halton sub group.
- 3.5 The other Council areas forming this proposal are Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens and the Wirral.
- 3.6 There are three models proposed to undertake the strategic commissioning through the sub regional grouping however the final decision will sit with the Young Peoples Learning Agency (YPLA), the national body that will assume responsibility from the Learning and Skills Council for the funding of 16-18 provision. On behalf of the Merseyside Directors of Childrens Services the 14-19 strategic leads from the six council areas have undertaken an assessment of each model detailed in Appendix 1. In summary :-

### **Model One**

Local Authorities undertake strategic commissioning collectively with **shared services** to manage Further Education (FE) and all 16-18 provision on behalf of the sub-regional grouping. In this model the agency will contract with the YPLA to commission all the sub regional 16-18 provision from local providers and 6<sup>th</sup> forms. This model removes the accountability of providers to individual Local Authorities and the decision on each authorities curriculum modelling would be subject to the ratification of the agency. Funding will be top sliced to fund agency staff and premises.

### **Model Two**

Local Authorities undertake strategic commissioning and **collectively agree** for a **lead Local Authority** to manage FE provision on behalf of the sub-regional grouping. In this model a lead local authority would be identified to hold the contract with the YPLA and act as a banker for Further Education provision in the sub region. This model could remove the accountability of Further Education Colleges to their Local Authorities. Curriculum modelling is more complex as it splits the planning and funding of 6<sup>th</sup> form and FE provision.

### **Model Three**

Local Authorities come together to share plans but **each local authority procures provision** from **providers within their own boundaries**. This model allows for a planning dialogue to take place sub regionally accountable to the Liverpool City Region Employment and Skills Board to ensure that individual 14-19 plans are meeting the sub regional, regional and national priorities. Each Local Authority would then commission provision for all 16-18 provision within their boundary against their local 14-19 Education plan.

There is strong support for model 3 from the 14-19 strategic Managers to the Directors of Childrens Services. In model 3 Local Authorities remain in control of their local planning and commissioning but through sub regional collaboration are accountable for meeting Multi Area Agreement priorities through Employment and Skills Board, this will ensure that both employers and learner demands are met and that provision is procured locally to meet learner needs. This is the preferred model for Halton Council at this stage in the process. This will be reviewed as the arrangements mature and will finally be determined by the YPLA.

- 3.7 Warrington Borough Council is believed to be proposing an arrangement with the new Council of Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester however discussions are underway to provide a

forum for St Helens, Halton and Warrington to have a strong planning dialogue.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Further decisions will be required when the full implications of LSC transfer is clear in 2009, particularly around transfer of resources to the Council.

#### **5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

##### **5.1 Children & Young People in Halton**

Children and young people choose a range of post 16 learning providers, including those Outside the Borough. It is important to coordinate this based on 'Travel to Learn' patterns across the sub region. Improved collaborative planning and commissioning locally will lead to a broader high quality of provision being available locally reducing the travel to learn requirements for Halton's learners.

##### **5.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

16-18 learning plays a critical role in the future employability of young people, and therefore the Borough's continued regeneration.

##### **5.3 A Healthy Halton**

16-18 learning reflects a range of opportunities to promote a Healthy Halton.

##### **5.4 A Safer Halton**

All 'Travel to Learn' Plans will reflect the safeguarding of young people.

##### **5.5 Halton's Urban Renewal**

16-18 Learning is key to the continued prosperity of Halton.

#### **6.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

6.1 It is a requirement of LSC transfer of responsibilities and funding that the Council work on a sub-regional basis in terms of commissioning for post 16 learning.

Whilst those proposals cement Post 16 learning across the City Region, the Council will need to ensure there is a strategic 16-18 relationship with the other Cheshire Authorities.

**7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

7.1 Planning for 16-18 year olds on a sub regional basis must ensure equality of access to learning for a broad range of young people. This includes young people with physical disabilities, or a learning difficulty.

It must also take account of the different faith communities and those young people from different racial heritage.

**8.0 REASON(S) FOR DECISION**

To comply with Machinery of Government requirements as part of the transfer of LSC responsibilities to Councils.

**9.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

To form a Sub Group with Cheshire Councils. Given the emphasis of working within the City Region for the reasons outlined in paragraph 3.4, this has not been put forward. However, key strategic linkages will be maintained with any Cheshire grouping, particularly with Warrington Council.

**10.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

**11.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>