

## **EMPLOYMENT LEARNING & SKILLS IN HALTON**

### **DRAFT ACTION PLAN**

**APRIL 2007-MARCH 2008**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Community Strategy for Halton sets out an overall vision whereby:

*Halton will be a thriving and vibrant borough where people can learn and develop their skills, enjoy a good quality of life with good health; a high quality, modern urban environment; the opportunity for all to fulfil their potential; greater wealth and equality; sustained by a thriving business community; and within safer, stronger and more attractive neighbourhood.*

The key challenge is how best to frame the response to these through the Community Strategy. To do this the vision has been grouped into five strategic themes, which are:

- A Healthy Halton
- Halton's Urban Renewal
- Halton's Children and Young People
- Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton
- A Safer Halton

Each of these thematic areas has been examined more closely in a series of Baseline Reports, which identify in detail the issues where we need to concentrate our improvement efforts. The Partnership is focusing heavily on these key issues and in turn focusing its future investment into achieving the challenging targets in each chosen theme.

To help do this, five Specialist Strategic Partnerships (SSPs) have been established. Their task is to design and deliver strategies and action plans to address priorities. Their plans are based upon the information and policy areas from the Baseline Reports, a range of key local strategies and on the expertise of the Partnership members.

The membership of the Employment, Learning and Skills Partnership has been drawn from all key agencies and groups operating in the fields of employment and worklessness, enterprise, skills and wealth generation across the private, statutory, voluntary and community sectors. All partners are given equal status and have a strategic voice in the partnerships decision-making and governance process. The partnership is chaired by Jobcentre Plus.

The following document is the NRF action plan for the Employment, Learning and Skills Specialist Strategic Partnership (SSP).

This document should be read in conjunction with the Terms of Reference for the partnership, the Community Strategy for Halton, Halton's Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the SSP's own detailed strategies for Employment, Skills and Enterprise.

### Our Overall Aim For Employment, Learning And Skills

The overall aim for Employment, Learning and Skills (ELS) as set out in the Community Strategy is:

*To create an economically prosperous borough that encourages investment, entrepreneurship, enterprise and business growth, and improves the education, skills and employment prospects of our residents and workforce so they can share in the all the opportunities Halton affords.*

### Why Employment, Learning And Skills?

A strong economy provides the key foundation for any prosperous and successful place. It provides jobs, opportunities, wealth and aspirations for local people. Sustainable economic growth and prosperity requires a commitment to encourage and support a vibrant business sector and a commitment to employment, learning and skills to satisfy all stakeholders in Halton.

Skills and employment are interlinked factors. Educational attainment whilst at school and the acquisition of important, employable skills are key determinants of individuals' life and employment chances. They have a major effect on people's ability to get a job, on the income they earn, on their aspirations, behaviour, health and longevity, and on the range of positive choices they are able to make in life. The creation of a strong, knowledge-based economy able to compete in the increasingly global market can only be achieved by investment in skills, a vibrant employment market and a robust culture of entrepreneurship.

In Halton there has been a sustained mismatch between the needs of local business and the skills of local people. This means that opportunity and need are out of balance and contribute to the widespread deprivation in Halton, despite a range of Government and Halton's own initiatives.

Research shows that the skill base of the local area is relatively poor compared to Great Britain as a whole and surrounding local economies. Halton has a low percentage of adults with further education qualifications and low rates of numeracy and literacy. All told, there is a mismatch between skills in the local workforce and jobs available in the borough. Looking to the future, estimates indicate that the majority of new jobs will require some form of higher education qualification. Over 95% of new jobs will need qualifications of at least NVQ 2 level; over 70% at NVQ 3 and above. There are forecast to be skill shortages across a range of sectors such as public services and retail by 2012.

High economic inactivity rates across the borough, with particular pockets of high deprivation and social exclusion, are endemic in the local economy. The Halton economy is heavily reliant on a narrow range of industry sectors and is susceptible to global pressures, which could have a negative effect. There is a lack of an enterprise culture in Halton, with generally low levels of business start-up, survival and growth.

Since the mid 1990's the number of people employed in the United Kingdom has risen. However, for some areas of the country such as Halton, this masks the stubbornness of the rates of economic inactivity that have largely stayed the same.

For example, despite a concentration on residents who are unemployed, there is a much larger group of working age people that are economically inactive, many of whom want to work. 31% of the adult working population of Halton are classed as workless, with 25.5% being economically inactive. The analysis of the spatial concentration of economically inactive people in Halton shows that 6 wards have inactivity rates at or in excess of 25% - Castlefields, Windmill Hill, Halton Lea, Kingsway, Riverside and Grange.

The Halton Community Strategy sets out a number of key objectives and improvement targets for the ELS SSP:

### **Key Objectives**

- A To foster a culture of enterprise and entrepreneurship and make Halton an ideal place to start and grow economic activity**
- B To develop a culture where learning is valued and raise skill levels throughout the adult population and in the local workforce**
- C To promote and increase the employability of local people and remove any barriers to employment to get more people into work**
- D To develop a strong, diverse, competitive and sustainable knowledge-based local economy**
- E To foster the financial inclusiveness of local people, including access to appropriate, supportive advice services where both empowerment and practical help can be provided**

### **Improvement Targets**

***By 2010 we aim to:***

<b><i>Employment</i></b>	Increase employment rate by 2%
<b><i>Economic Inactivity</i></b>	Reduce rate by 10%
<b><i>Skills</i></b>	Increase number of adults qualified to Level 3 by 25%
<b><i>Skills</i></b>	Increase number of adults qualified to Level 2 by 15%
<b><i>Learning</i></b>	Reduce number of adults with no qualifications by 15%
<b><i>Enterprise</i></b>	Increase rate of self-employment by 20%
<b><i>Growth</i></b>	Increase number of VAT registrations by 15%
<b><i>Knowledge economy</i></b>	Increase number of adults qualified to Level 4/5 by 15%
<b><i>Equity</i></b>	Ensure unemployment rate in any ward is less than 20% above the borough average

## Floor Targets

Since 2000, central Government departments have had Public Service Agreements (PSAs), which set out the targets they are expected to achieve. In 2004 these targets were revised as part of the Government's Spending Review (SR04).

Some of these targets are called floor targets, which is a generic term used by the Government to describe targets that set a minimum standard for disadvantaged groups or areas.

A floor target aims to:

- ✓ Help reduce the gap between the poorest areas and the rest of the country.
- ✓ Show what the priorities should be at a local level.
- ✓ Make sure that where public services are failing, they get better.
- ✓ Sometimes set the minimum standard for poor areas and disadvantaged groups.

Many floor targets are directly related to the aims of the Government's National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and have been taken into account when allocating Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. The Government is placing an increasing emphasis on these targets.

The key floor targets for Employment, Learning & Skills are:

- As part of the wider objective of full employment in every region, over the three years to Spring 2008, and taking account of the economic cycle:
  - demonstrate progress on increasing the employment rate;
  - increase the employment rates of disadvantaged groups (lone parents, ethnic minorities, people aged 50 and over, those with the lowest qualifications, and those living in the local authority wards with the poorest initial labour market position)
  - significantly reduce the difference between the employment rates of the disadvantaged groups and the overall rate.
- Make sustainable improvements in the economic performance of all English regions by 2008, and over the long term reduce the persistent gap in growth rates between the regions, demonstrating progress by 2006.
- Build an enterprise society in which small firms of all kinds thrive and achieve their potential, with:
  - (i) an increase in the number of people considering going into business,
  - (ii) an improvement in the overall productivity of small firms
  - (iii) more enterprise in disadvantaged communities.

## **KEY DRIVERS FOR FUTURE PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITY**

### Introduction

Whilst Halton has made great strides in the creation of new jobs and the general reduction in unemployment, we can see that the gap between individuals and the labour market in some instances has not improved as much for certain groups. It is therefore the intention of the SSP to specifically target certain key groups and tailor interventions to their needs:

- People aged 50 years and over
- Economically inactive women
- Lone parents with dependent children
- Young long-term unemployed, particularly NEET and Care Leavers
- People with health conditions or disabilities, especially those in receipt of Incapacity Benefit
- The Priority Target Wards of Castlefields, Windmill Hill, Halton Lea, Kingsway, Riverside, Grange and Appleton

It is evident that there is a need to achieve a step change in employment and skills related activity in Halton. The key elements in achieving this will be:

- A formal recognition that worklessness and not just JSA claimants should be the focus.
- Targeting as necessary to achieve a step change – both in terms of groupings and geography.
- Interventions will be holistic and personalised to individual people's needs and this must involve a full range of partners working together.
- Putting Enterprise at the heart of addressing worklessness.
- Improving Connectivity with jobs
- Ensuring more work is done to address the basic skills gaps.
- Developing the substantial scope for the voluntary sector to be developed in employment-related activity, particularly social enterprises.
- Forging stronger links between urban renewal leading to job creation investments and local labour markets through more effective use of outreach job brokerage, working with developers and investing companies.
- Ensuring stronger links are made between investment opportunities and local labour markets.
- To advance financial inclusiveness by maximizing the income of Halton residents, assisting citizens to manage their levels of debt and by taking positive measures to overcome benefit dependency for those able to work.

A number of key strategies developed and adopted by the SSP add detail to these aims:

### A Workforce and Skills Strategy for Halton

During 2006 the ELS SSP produced the first Workforce Development Strategy for Halton. This sits alongside the other commissioned and complementary strategies of the ELS SSP for Employment and Enterprise.

The Workforce and Skills Strategy has been developed in alignment with a number of key regional and national strategic policies and drivers including the Green Paper on

Welfare Reform, the Northern Way, the Regional Economic Strategy and the Liverpool City Region Development Programme. The strategy also takes into account the establishment of Train to Gain (The National Employer Training Programme), the introduction of funding support for adults hoping to gain their first full level 2 qualification, the creation of Business Skills Northwest, expectations that colleges and education/training providers will become more responsive to employers needs and an increasing sectoral focus for economic and workforce development strategy and activity.

The industrial structure of Halton is changing, and with it the skills needed by local employers. There is a move away from low skilled manufacturing occupations to more customer focused service sector employment and higher skilled manufacturing jobs. By 2011 nine out of ten new and replacement jobs will require a qualification at level 2 or above, with over a quarter requiring a level 4 qualification.

Unemployment in Halton has reduced over the years but there are high levels of economic activity within an ageing working age population. The proportion of Halton's working age population holding intermediate level qualifications (NVQ 2 or equivalent) is slightly higher than regional and national average but compares poorly at either end of the qualification spectrum.

Over the next five years skills mismatches will widen. Employers will require more highly skilled and qualified people to remain competitive and Halton residents will need to raise skills and qualifications levels in order to meet these needs.

The ELS SSP has therefore established a vision for skills in the Borough as "the development of a skilled workforce that meets the needs of business"

To achieve this vision the strategy has two key objectives:

- Meeting the needs of business
- Encouraging Skills Development

In order to achieve these two objectives a number of actions have been identified and are detailed in the Action Plan at Appendix 1. The strategy predominantly concentrates on monitoring new ways of working and promoting skills developments to businesses and individuals through improved communications and clear progression routes. Above all, the Action Plan is about making partners work more closely together and reducing confusion and duplication.

### Halton Employment Strategy

In 2005 Life Chances and Employment Specialist Strategic Partnership (SSP) Strategic commissioned the development of an employment strategy and action plan for the Borough to reduce economic inactivity and raise current levels of economic activity. Following on the development of the Local Strategic Partnership since that time, the newly created Employment, Learning and Skills Partnership is now responsible for the strategy and its implementation. The strategy is complemented by both the Workforce and Skills Strategy and Halton's Enterprise Strategy.

The Halton Employment Strategy has been developed in alignment with other key policy developments including the Green Paper on Welfare Reform, the Northern Way, Regional Economic Strategy and the Liverpool City Region Development Programme. It was also announced during 2006 that the joint Merseyside wide bid

that Halton made to be part of the city employment strategy pilot has been successful. This will allow for the development of a Merseyside wide initiative aimed at tackling worklessness and will boost the activity already underway in Halton.

An important part of understanding why people are economically inactive is to look at the barriers people face when seeking employment, for example lack of basic skills or other qualifications, caring responsibilities, lack of work experience, transport problems, cultural issues, lack of confidence, ill health or disability etc. It is also important to consider that whilst many people who are currently inactive do not want a job, there are also a significant proportion of people who do.

Whilst Halton has made great strides in the creation of new jobs and the general reduction in unemployment, for some groups the gap between them and the labour market needs to be reduced still further, for example the over 50s, economically inactive women, lone parents with dependent children, young long-term unemployed and those experiencing poor health or disability need further support. It is clear that in some areas of the borough levels of inactivity remain stubbornly high and these areas would also benefit from more targeted support. It is also evident that opportunities for employment within the public sector, enterprise development and transport and connectivity issues are not been fully explored and exploited.

The Halton Employment Strategy has therefore proposed a number of elements to achieve a step-change in the levels of worklessness in Halton, including;

- A recognition that worklessness and not just JSA claimants should be the focus
- Targeting both in terms of groupings and geography
- Holistic interventions, personalised to need and involving all partners
- Putting enterprise at the heart of addressing worklessness
- Improving connectivity with jobs
- Addressing the basic skills gap
- Greater involvement from the voluntary sector, particularly around social enterprise
- Making stronger links between investment opportunities and the local labour market

A full list of interventions proposed underneath the Halton Employment Strategy is set out at Appendix 1

### Halton Enterprise Strategy

A series of key reports ranging from the wide ranging *Halton: Gateway to Prosperity 2005-2008* to the Regeneris Report *Strategy for a Culture of Enterprise* have highlighted the importance of developing an “enterprise culture and improving the performance of business” if the Borough is to enjoy a “thriving and sustainable economy.” These reports have also highlighted the major challenges facing the Borough over the medium term. Notably

- With the exception of chemicals, most local high value added wealth-creating sectors are under-represented within the local economy;
- Local specialisation is predominantly based within sectors that generate below (local) average GDP per employee; and
- Lower value-added sectors account for close to 60% of estimated GDP.

In 2006 a decision was made by the Employment, Learning and Skills SSP to refresh the previous Enterprise Strategy for Halton. The final report for this refreshed strategy – entitled ‘Connections, Connectivity and Communications’ updates the information from the previous strategy and makes a series of recommendations for the future of enterprise development in Halton.

The strategy aims for the creation of a true enterprise culture where people recognise that they have the talent to shape their own economic future through self-employment and business creation; existing businesses have the confidence, skills and capabilities to grow and geographically mobile ventures see Halton as a quality environment in which to build their future.

The recommendations contained in the report tackle these issues in a sustained, strategic and deliverable way. At the heart of the proposals outlined below are three core propositions.

- First that Halton places the creation and embedding of a true enterprise culture across the Borough at the heart of its economic, social and development policies;
- Second that Halton builds its enterprise strategy around the three interlinked concepts of connections, connectivity and communication;
- Third that the enterprise strategy looks forward confidently to the future by recognising the remarkable achievements of the people of the area in shaping the world in which we live.

To drive enterprise in the Borough forward by building around these core propositions an array of policies, programmes and mechanisms have been designed to deliver:

- i An understanding of the importance of enterprise for the individual and the community
- ii Sharp increases in new business formation (including social enterprises)
- iii A larger stock of businesses
- iv A local culture which sees enterprise and entrepreneurship as vital components not only for a strong economy but as the keys to a healthy community.

A full list of these proposals is contained at Appendix 1

It should be noted that for all three of the strategies commissioned by the SSP, a detailed timetable for the delivery of the strategic proposals will be developed by the newly established task groups of the SSP as one of their first tasks.

### The Leitch Review

The Leitch Review was tasked in 2004 with considering the UK’s long-term skills needs. The UK’s skills base remains weak by international standards, holding back productivity, growth and social justice and the review has found that, even if current targets to improve skills are met, the UK’s skills base will still lag behind that of many comparator countries in 2020. Basically, the UK will run to stand still.

The global economy is changing rapidly, with emerging economies such as India and China growing dramatically, altering UK competitiveness. The population is ageing, technological change and global migration flows are increasing and there is a direct correlation between skills, productivity and employment. Unless the UK can build on

reforms to schools, colleges and universities and make its skills base one of its strengths, UK businesses will find it increasingly difficult to compete. As a result of low skills, the UK risks increasing inequality, deprivation and child poverty, and risks a generation cut off permanently from labour market opportunity. The best form of welfare is to ensure that people can adapt to change. Skills were once a key lever for prosperity and fairness. Skills are now increasingly *the* key lever.

The Review recommends that the UK commit to becoming a world leader in skills by 2020, benchmarked against the upper quartile of the OECD. This means doubling attainment at most levels. Stretching objectives for 2020 are recommended including:

- 95 per cent of adults to achieve the basic skills of functional literacy and numeracy, an increase from levels of 85 per cent literacy and 79 per cent numeracy in 2005;
- Exceeding 90 per cent of adults qualified to at least Level 2, an increase from 69 per cent in 2005 and a commitment to go further and achieve 95 per cent as soon as possible;
- Shifting the balance of intermediate skills from Level 2 to Level 3 and improving the esteem, quantity and quality of intermediate skills. This means 1.9 million additional Level 3 attainments over the period and boosting the number of Apprentices to 500,000 a year;
- Exceeding 40 per cent of adults qualified to Level 4 and above, up from 29 per cent in 2005, with a commitment to continue progression.

The following principles underpin delivery of a raised ambition:

- **shared responsibility.** Employers, individuals and the Government must increase action and investment. Employers and individuals should contribute most where they derive the greatest private returns. Government investment must focus on market failures, ensuring a basic platform of skills for all, targeting help where it is needed most;
- **focus on economically valuable skills.** Skill developments must provide real returns for individuals, employers and society. Wherever possible, skills should be portable to deliver mobility in the labour market for individuals and employers;
- **demand-led skills.** The skills system must meet the needs of individuals and employers. Vocational skills must be demand-led rather than centrally planned;
- **adapt and respond.** No one can accurately predict future demand for particular skill types. The framework must adapt and respond to future market needs; and
- **build on existing structures.** Don't always chop and change. Instead, improve performance of current structures through simplification and rationalisation, stronger performance management and clearer remits. Continuity is important.

The Review's remit is to focus on adult skills. This is because 70 per cent of the 2020 working age population have already left compulsory education and the flow of young people will reduce. However, the Review also recognises how vital effective education for young people is to the new ambition. School standards have improved over the past decade, with more young people than ever achieving five good GCSEs. And yet, more than one in six young people leave school unable to read, write and add up properly and the proportion of young people staying in education past 16 is

below OECD average. The Review therefore also emphasises how critical reforms to GCSEs are to improve functional literacy and numeracy.

### **Main recommendations**

- **Increase adult skills across all levels.** Progress towards world class is best measured by the number of people increasing skills attainment. The raised ambitions will require additional investment by the State, employers and individuals. The Government is committed to increasing the share of GDP for education and skills. Additional annual investment in skills up to Level 3 will need to rise to £1.5-2 billion by 2020. Increased investment is required in higher education, but costings are difficult to project accurately;
- **Reroute** public funding for adult vocational skills in England, apart from community learning, through Train to Gain and Learner Accounts by 2010.
- **Strengthen employer voice.** Rationalise existing bodies, strengthen the collective voice and better articulate employer views on skills by creating a new Commission for Employment and Skills, reporting to central Government. The Commission will manage employer influence on skills, within a national framework of individual rights and responsibilities;
- **Increase employer engagement** and investment in skills. Reform, relicense and empower Sector Skills Councils (SSC) and deliver more economically valuable skills by only allowing public funding for vocational qualifications where the content has been approved by SSCs. Expanding skills brokerage services for both small and large employers;
- **Launch a new 'Pledge' for employers** to voluntarily commit to train all eligible employees up to Level 2 in the workplace. In 2010, review progress of employer delivery and if the improvement rate is insufficient, introduce a statutory entitlement to workplace training at Level 2 in consultation with employers and unions;
- **Increase employer investment** in Level 3 and 4 qualifications in the workplace, extend Train to Gain to higher levels and dramatically increase Apprenticeship volumes. Improve engagement between employers and universities and increase co-funded workplace degrees. Increase the focus on Level 5 and above skills;
- **Increase people's aspirations** and awareness of the value of skills to them and their families. Create high profile, sustained awareness programmes and rationalise existing fragmented 'information silos' and develop a new universal adult careers service; and
- **Create a new integrated employment and skills service**, based upon existing structures, to increase sustainable employment and progression. Launch a new programme to improve basic skills for those out of work, embedding this support for disadvantaged people and repeat claimants. Develop a network of employer led Employment and Skills Boards, building on current models, to influence delivery.

### **Impact.**

These recommendations will have a strong and enduring impact across all sectors of society. For example:

- All individuals will have a greater awareness of the value of skills development and easier access to the opportunities available;

- Workless people will have a better chance to find a job through effective diagnosis of their skills needs and greater support as they make the transition into sustainable work;
- Low-skilled workers will have more chances to gain a full Level 2 qualification and basic skills in the workplace through Train to Gain, and more control over flexible, rewarding learning through their Learner Account;
- Skilled workers will have more opportunities to develop their careers in the workplace, through Apprenticeships, degrees and management and leadership programmes;
- Small firms will have easier access to relevant training for their employees. Management skills, competitiveness and productivity will improve;
- Employers will have more influence over skills strategy within a simplified system, greater incentives to invest in skills across all levels; advice through expanded skills brokerage and increased assistance for workplace training; and
- Skills deficiencies will reduce. Upskilling and portable, economically valuable qualifications throughout the entire workforce will ensure improved labour supply. The UK will be in a position to compete with the best in the world. Productivity and employment rates should increase and Poverty and inequality decrease

### Halton's Local Area Agreement

The purpose of Halton's Local Area Agreement (LAA) is to take the joint thinking of the Partnership, enshrined in the Community Strategy, and make it happen through joint planning and delivery.

As part of this one of the key challenges is how best to frame a response to the major issues that Halton faces through the LAA. The Halton Partnership believes that the answer lies in using the LAA to focus on a small number of issues, which, if we were successful at addressing, would make a significant improvement to quality of life in the borough. These transformational issues have been identified on the basis of two criteria:

- Those where progress has not been as significant as we would have liked – identified from statistics, public perception and concern, and areas for focus in recent LSP reviews;
- Those which would have a positive impact across a range of our objectives and targets.

It has been agreed that the following four areas best fit the criteria outlined above

- Employment & Skills;
- Alcohol Harm Reduction;
- Anti-Social Behaviour and;
- Liveability.

Halton intends to use the “energy” and focus an LAA brings to make measurable progress in those intractable areas and to exemplify the joined-up nature of how the Halton Strategic Partnership addresses key issues, which cut across all five blocks of the LAA.

### How will we work to address the issue of Employment, Learning and Skills across the LAA?

The LAA mirrors the strategic priorities of the Community Strategy which were arrived at through extensive consultation with both the community and partners, and through research and analysis into the prevailing conditions within the borough. The worklessness agenda and associated strategy clearly lie within the Employment, Learning and Skills Strategic Priority, and we recognise that inroads can only be made to addressing the issue through a comprehensive cross-partnership and multiagency approach.

The structure of Government funding often prevents pooling, as national organisations lack freedom due to the existence of nationally delivered schemes. This is an area for further consideration within the context of this Local Area Agreement. However, it is fair to say that much local progress has already been made in alignment of activity and this will be further enhanced through the City Employment Strategy.

To measure the success of the LAA we have proposed a broad-based strategic approach that looks to tackle employability, workforce development and the creation of enterprise. At the same time we want to ensure equity in the economy i.e. that the wealth that is created in the borough is better shared around Halton. Specifically, as the Employment, Learning and Skills SSP we have set targets within the LAA to:

- Increase the overall employment rate.
- Markedly reduce the economic inactivity rate.
- Increase the number of adults qualified all levels.
- Reduce the number of adults with no qualifications.
- Increase the rate of self-employment.
- Increase the number of VAT registrations.

The outcomes framework setting out the LAA targets and milestones for which the ELS SSP is responsible are set out at **Appendix 3**

#### Neighbourhood Renewal Funded Projects

The Neighbourhood Renewal Projects being funded under the Employment, Learning and Skills Partnership during 2007/2008 are shown at **Appendix 2**.

Many of these projects are continuation projects from 2006-2007 and in many cases have either sought or been allocated a reduced funding during this financial year. All projects have been made aware that this is the final year that they can expect to receive NRF funding and as such are being asked to develop detailed exit or project continuation strategies in advance of March 2008.

#### Monitoring and Evaluation

The partnership is responsible for approving NRF allocations for the financial year and the Chair of the Partnership will be responsible for ensuring that Service Agreements are completed by all project managers in receipt of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding. No NRF will be paid to projects unless a satisfactory Service Agreement has been completed, been signed by both the project manager and the Partnership Chair and been received by the Central Partnership Team.

An NRF performance management sub-group has been established for the Employment, Learning and Skills SSP and meets on a bi-monthly basis to oversee project monitoring and performance management.

Any changes to project funding or outcome profiles will be agreed by the Chair and approved by the Performance Management Group on behalf of the SSP. The central LSP team will then be notified of any such changes.

### Partnership Activity 2006-2007

The ELS Partnership's main task during 2006-2007 has been to establish itself as the Specialist Strategic Partnership for Employment, Learning and Skills. In the first instance this has meant identifying members, appointing chairs, developing terms of reference and establishing a cycle of meetings and a strategic agenda.

The SSP inherited a legacy of NRF funded projects from both the former Enhancing Life Chances and Employment SSP and the Increasing Wealth and Equality SSP. Budgets and Service agreements needed to be agreed for these projects and new projects and activity commissioned against partnership priority and need. In July a programme of activity directly aimed at delivering on the new priorities of the Halton Partnership was commissioned and implemented

In addition to managing Neighbourhood Renewal Funding and monitoring and evaluating NRF projects, the Employment, Learning and Skills SSP is responsible for moving the Employment, Enterprise, Skills and Learning agenda forward in Halton and has sought to develop itself as the strategic body for post-19 employment, enterprise learning and skills in Halton, co-ordinating and leading policy and activity in this area. This ambition will be continued throughout 2007-2008.

Despite the fact that the Employment, Learning and Skills SSP is still a new partnership and is in the first full year of development, during this time significant progress has been made in pushing forward the ELS agenda in Halton.

Examples of policy and activity undertaken to date include:

- Commissioning and Managing 17 Employment, Learning and Skills related NRF projects
- Producing Four Strategies and Action Plans for the key SSP areas of Employment, Enterprise, Workforce Development and Basic Skills
- Establishing Operational Task Groups for Employment, Enterprise, Skills and Performance Management to take forward the Strategies and Action Plans.
- Developing a clear Partnership identity and branding and commencing with a Communications Plan.
- Producing and Maintaining a website presence for the SSP
- Developing and negotiating the Economic Development Block of Halton's Local Area Agreement
- Setting up a programme of regular Partnership Policy Briefings
- Undertaking a detailed Partnership Mapping Exercise mapping targets against partners' provision to help in focusing commissioning, developing strategy and negotiating the LAA
- Advising on the Development of a Local Enterprise Growth Initiative bid

## Intended Partnership Activity 2007-2008

2007 – 2008 will see the second year of development and activity for the Employment, Learning and Skills Partnership. The Partnership will be using this time to consolidate Partnership relationships and continue to build commitment to the Partnership.

In addition, it is intended that the subgroups will be fully developed during 2007-2008 and will take increasing responsibility for the development and delivery of the Partnerships strategies and action plans and for the monitoring of NRF projects.

A review of membership and chairing arrangements will also be conducted during April 2007 and a number of partnership development events are planned.

The SSP will continue to manage and commission NRF projects and will also begin a review of activity to give consideration to the implications for the SSP and its activity post April 2008 when it is anticipated that NRF funding, together with a range of other structural funding, will cease.

The SSP will also have a key role to play in the implementation and monitoring of the Economic Development Block of the LAA. A key part of this, and a key part of the SSP programme of work in general will be in supporting the Urban Renewal aspects of the LAA.

The ELS SSP also anticipate an increased role in developing cross-partnership activity. This is particularly the case in terms of the Urban Renewal Agenda in making sure that local people are both benefiting from, and able to access the jobs being created through new developments in the borough. The Urban Renewal Partnership also have targets, mirrored in the LAA, around improving the image of Halton to make it an attractive place to invest and create jobs and in using housing developments and improvements to create sustainable economic communities. The ELS SSP clearly has a role to play in delivering this agenda and ensuring a joining up of activity between partnerships.

In addition to this activity, further links will be explored between other SSPs. For example ELS have already been asked to demonstrate how the activity of partners can contribute towards the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy which links to both the Health and Safer Halton Partnerships and there are clear links between one of the partnerships key priorities of reducing the numbers of Halton residents claiming incapacity benefit by moving into employment and the agenda of the Health Partnership. The links between Employment, Learning and Skills and the Children and Young People's Partnership are also explicit, particularly around the Learning and Skills agenda, the transition between school age education, further and higher education and the issue of NEET and close partnership links will need to be developed and maintained in order to ensure a seamless transition for Halton's young people.

A detailed programme of activity for the SSP and its operational groups is attached at Appendix's 1,2 and 3

An outline programme of NRF funding allocations is attached at Appendix 2