

## **Minutes of Employment, Learning and Skills Performance Group Meeting**

**Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2007 at 2pm.**

Present: Gary Collins (Chair), Diane Sproson, David Gray, John White, Lisa Driscoll.

Apologies: Cllr. Eddie Jones

### **1.0 Minutes and Matters Arising**

- 1.1 The minutes of the previous Performance Group had been approved at the ELS SSP on January 9<sup>th</sup>.
- 1.2 There were no Matters Arising.

### **2.0 General Discussion**

- 2.1 The Quarter 3 returns had been previously emailed to the group and the group looked at a sample of them. Projects had been invited in to talk to the meeting where there had been clarification needed over the activities of the project, progress or future funding needs.
- 2.2 It was noted that Riverside College had been invited in to talk through the Riverside College childcare project, however the co-ordinator was only informed on day of the meeting that they would be unable to attend. The group were disappointed in this, as there were a number of issues to resolve around both previous performance in completing Quarterly Returns in time and with regards to the budget for next year. It was agreed to call another meeting of the group specifically to meet with this project.
- 2.3 It was noted that both the CAB Debt Advisors project and the Links to Work project had submitted project updates to the group in addition to their Quarterly Returns. The group welcomed this approach and it was agreed that the CAB Debt Advice Project would attend the next meeting of the Performance Group as they were keen to make a verbal update but had been unable to attend this time.
- 2.4 It was agreed to ask for more detail on some aspects of the Workforce Development Project to assess whether there is still the need for this budget line for 2007/2008 in the light of Train to Gain.
- 2.5 There is an unallocated sum of money within the 'Responding to the Strategy' budget line. It was suggested that the SSPs sub-groups be asked to develop one project each for discussion at the March SSP meeting. The project should address one of the key outcomes identified within the SSPs

strategies, last for a maximum period of up to March 2008 and not be used to fund additional posts. Projects could submit projects up to the full amount available or for a portion of the funding.

### **3.0 Halton Family Groups**

3.1 Paul Hetherington, the Project Manager for the Halton Family Groups Childcare, Training and Employment project spoke to the group. The project had been recruiting local residents as volunteers; completing enhanced CRB checks and health checks with them and then placing them within the NCH Family Group Network in Halton whilst training them to NVQ level 2 in childcare. The project then plans to support them in helping them move into employment.

3.2 The project is currently engaged with 10 local people who had been drawn from hard to reach groups and priority wards. The project manager noted that they had hoped to be working with more individuals but that completing the CRB checks had taken longer than anticipated. Project participants so far had come from Hough Green ward in Widnes and Castlefields ward in Runcorn. The project was also working within the Windmill Hill ward and was intensifying efforts there to recruit participants.

3.3 It was explained that if funding were allocated for 2007/2008 this would enable another cohort to be recruited and trained. The Project Manager assured the group that even if participants took longer than 12 months to complete the NVQ that NCH would undertake to ensure that they saw the training through to the end. The overall objective was to ensure the trainees moved into paid employment.

3.4 The project manager assured the group that NCH would be able to absorb the costs associated with a 10% cut in budget for 2007/2008. They would also look to seek alternative funding post 2008. It was also explained that the NCH's National Training Centre was interested in the project and was looking at how this could be replicated nationally as the project was an innovative departure from their usual work programme.

**3.5 The Performance Group therefore recommended an allocation of £30,400 for the Project for 2007/2008 subject to SSP approval and a satisfactory SLA.**

3.6 It was also suggested that the project make links with HPIJ to explore how they could help support the employment aims of the project.

### **4.0 Bill Payment Service**

4.1 Deana Perchard, the Project Manager for the Bill Payment Service project outlined the key elements and achievements of the project. The project is a joint project between the Credit Union and Halton Borough Council.

4.2 It was explained that the Project Name did not now reflect the activities of the project as the focus had been changed during 2006/07 from moving people off pre-payment meters to running budgeting skills and financial accountability workshops. The new title of the project will therefore be 'Budgeting Skills'

- 4.3 The original project had focused on moving people from pre-payment meters; however, this had not proved successful as many residents preferred to remain on meters as a way of budgeting more effectively. During 2006/2007 the project therefore focused on budgeting skills as this had proved a popular aspect of the previous project.
- 4.4 It was explained that although workshops had taken place, these had limited success, as people were reluctant to discuss their financial position so openly. More success had been enjoyed through 1-1 sessions and the project intends to build on this in the future.
- 4.5 The assessment measures originally planned to measure the success of the project were also being revised, as the long-term outcome was to ensure that people felt more secure in their financial position. However, the project felt that it was asking this question too early and were revising this, as people's initial reaction was often shock at their financial position.
- 4.6 Overall the project was so far estimated to have made £35,000 of savings to Halton residents in terms of arrears negotiation, budgeting skills, financial incentives and benefit claims
- 4.7 The Credit Union through the project had been able to help a number of people affected by the Farepack situation in the form of low cost instant loans thus reducing the need for residents to use loan sharks or doorstep lenders.
- 4.8 The links between this project and the CAB project were explored. This project (through the Credit Union) deals with more of a low level issue than CAB usually tackle and also enhances the provision available through the credit union. For example, the Credit Union is now able to ensure that all applicants attend budgeting sessions before loans are made.
- 4.9 It was explained that clients for the service are found through leafleting, newspaper advertising, Credit Union collection point, schools, Halton Housing Trust and word of mouth. Some work had been carried out in schools but this would be looked at further next year. Diane Sproson expressed an interest in this from the point of view of the Connexions Service.
- 4.10 The project manager explained that they would still be able to deliver the project in 2007/2008 with a 10% reduction. This would mean a reduction in the marketing budget.
- 4.11 **The Performance Group therefore recommends that an NRF allocation of £32,606 be made to the project for 2007/2008.**

## **5.0 Halton YMCA Skills for Life**

- 5.1 Claire Bradbury, Project Manager for the YMCA Skills for Life Project explained that they had outperformed on a number of their outcomes as they had managed to lever in additional funding, had seen more people coming into sessions and retention on the programme had improved. Claire also provided the group with a handout showing the progression of individuals on the programme

- 5.2 The higher than anticipated success of the project has also in part been attributable to using elements such as music, DIY etc to enhance Basic Skills Provision.
- 5.3 The project intended to review the times at which sessions took place as a shorter day is often more effective than a 9-5 session. This would also enable early evening sessions to be organised.
- 5.4 It was estimated that around 70% of YMCA residents had some form of basic skills need and as a result most referrals were from within the YMCA. However, the project also hoped to work with both HAP and Belvedere.
- 5.5 It was noted by the group that the performance of some of the individuals on the project was excellent with take-up highest for the numeracy options.
- 5.6 The project also intended to develop a Widnes base as well as a Runcorn base as they have managed to secure funding to purchase additional interactive equipment.
- 5.7 The YMCA project intended to manoeuvre the hours the project ran between to manage a 10% reduction in funding in order to ensure best footfall for the project and keep numbers of participants high. It was also explained that this might affect the inroads the project could make into Belvedere.
- 5.8 The project manager also informed the group that full detailed records were kept on both individual clients and disaffected groups being helped by the project and that these would be available for inspection upon request.
- 5.9 The performance group therefore recommends an NRF budget of £20,250 be allocated to this project for 2007/2008.**

## **6.0 Halton People into Jobs Outreach**

- 6.1 Julie Quinn, Project Manager for the HPIJ Outreach programme spoke to the group to update them on how far they had managed to catch up on Project Performance as, due to issues around staff secondment, purchasing etc, the project had got off to a slow start.
- 6.2 Julie explained that the project was now working in 15 locations across the 7 target wards and with three Outreach Workers, seconded from JCP, now in place. From November 2006 they had been working in the neighbourhoods for 4 days out of 5 every week.
- 6.3 There are continuing problems with the ICT system, but once this is resolved Outreach Work will take place on 5 out of 5 days. The system, once fully operational looks likely to be very successful.
- 6.4 There have been 75 job outcomes in total to date, which is higher than anticipated. 125 households are engaged with the project. 135 Individual Development Plans have been produced and 13 people have received specialist advice. 26 individuals have signed up for the Halton Charter and 4 have been referred to further learning.

- 6.5 A coffee morning had taken place for IB claimants, which enabled them to gain 11 new clients, 2 of whom had been moved into work and off long term IB. It is intended to continue this approach with a further stock of IB clients who will be assessed according to their job readiness.
- 6.6 The project manager explained the need to refine some of the targets they had projected in the original service agreement and it was agreed that this would be looked at through the 2007/2008 Service Planning Process.
- 6.7 The project manager anticipated a potential shortfall in funding for next year given the 10% budget reduction for the project. It was felt that this would be managed by either becoming tougher with the eligibility criteria or by capping the amount of support available as the year progresses.
- 6.8 The Performance Group recommended that an NRF budget of £112,500 be allocated to the project for 2007/2008**
- 7.0 Happen 4U Phase 2**
- 7.1 The Happen 4U project had been asked to attend the Performance Group, as there had been a number of concerns about the performance and outcomes of the project.
- 7.2 Melissa Critchley from Age Concern and David Atkinson from HITS attended the group.
- 7.3 It was reported that as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006, two of the partners (Kings Cross and Halton Voluntary Action) would withdraw from the Partnership. The Community Research part of the project was now also the only element now being pursued.
- 7.4 There were 4 parts to the SLA signed with ELS; employing a research manager; undertaking a feasibility study into shared premises for the voluntary sector through HVA; bringing in external mentoring for the business planning process and; a research report into voluntary sector collaboration.
- 7.5 The Research Report was now available in draft form and will be published in the next few months.
- 7.6 The project has been unable to recruit a research manager to date. Therefore the project has asked Martin Halton from the Seedworthy Langworthy Trust to work with the project for two days per week on a consultancy basis on business planning, market development and supervising existing research projects. It is proposed that they will buy in more of his time if additional work is secured.
- 7.7 The feasibility study into shared premises is going ahead with the initial research done and 16 voluntary organisations interviewed to assess the market. Debbie Dalby is to undertake the next stage of the research, including site visits and it is intended to employ some form of mentor support at a cost of £2,500 as part of this.

- 7.8 It was explained that some of the elements around mentor support were different from those outlined in the Quarterly Return and this would therefore need to be amended.
- 7.9 The project intended to submit a bid for Lottery Funding in May/June of this year and would use the Business Plan being developed by Martin Halton as the basis of this.
- 7.10 David Gray asked how the project intended to address the problem of the Runcorn/Widnes divide and why the existing Partnership Centre was not suitable. It was agreed that the issue of the bridge needed to be looked at and was explained that the Partnership Centre in Runcorn was not large enough to accommodate the number of potential users.
- 7.11 It was emphasised that the project needed to complete the feasibility study within this financial year in order to be able to draw down the NRF funding and that evidence of this would be needed.
- 7.12 John White questioned the amount of money being spent on consultants' fees as part of this project and what the long-term benefits of the project would be. Concern was also raised around 2 of the main partners ceasing to be involved and how this would impact upon a feasibility study aimed at enhancing joint working and shared costs.
- 7.13 The project explained that it had needed to commission other people to take on the work due to failure to recruit. It was also suggested that although the original partners were disengaging from the project, the project would still be of value to other voluntary and community agencies in Halton.
- 7.14 John White expressed concern that the changes to the project differ significantly from what was laid out in the Service Agreement and that this should have been agreed by the SSP and the Central Team notified once changes have been approved. As this hadn't happened the audit trail for the project was lacking.
- 7.15 The project expected to spend all of the NRF allocation and had already committed to spending this money.
- 7.16 It was requested that a more detailed report be submitted to John White outlining the outcomes of the project, explaining how the money would be spent and clarifying how this SLA linked to the Service Agreement linked to that held between Happen 4U and the Halton Partnership Team. This report would then be assessed by the Performance Group to ensure that they were satisfied with the changes before any future payments were made.
- 7.17 The Happen 4U project would not be seeking NRF funding for 2007/2008 as they are intending to bid for lottery funding. The Performance Group were happy to endorse this as, due to the problems associated with this project and the SSPs own budgetary restraints it would have been unlikely that the project would have received future funding from the SSP.
- 7.18 Gary Collins requested that a further brief report on the lessons learnt from the Happen 4U project be prepared for the benefit of the SSP.

7.19 The Performance Group noted that their key concerns were around the failure to declare changes to the SLA and over the potential breakdown of the relationships within the Happen 4U project.

**8.0 Any Other Business**

8.1 There was no other business

**9.0 Date and Time of the Next Meeting**

9.1 The next meeting would be organised via email as an additional session to interview more projects was needed.