On 5 December George Osborne delivered the government’s Autumn Statement to the House of Commons. The statement provides an update on the state of the economy, and sets out the government’s future plans and new economic initiatives. Headline news was that economic growth has again been slower than expected, and estimates relating to the rate at which the public deficit will decline as a proportion of GDP have been revised back one year.

The statement commits to taking forward Lord Heseltine’s economic growth proposals through devolution of a greater proportion of growth related spending to local areas from April 2015. Local Enterprise Partnerships will be strengthened with money available for capacity building, a new concessionary borrowing rate for infrastructure projects, and an extra £350 million put into the Regional Growth Fund. The statement sets out a further series of investment support packages including £5.5 billion to promote infrastructure investment in new roads, science infrastructure, free schools and academies.

For more information go to www.hm-treasury.gov.uk

**Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner**

Following election on 15 November, former MP for Liverpool Wavertree Jane Kennedy was elected to the post of Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside, and formally sworn in a week later. The new Police and Crime Commissioner replaces the Police Authority previously comprised of councillors from the five Merseyside local authorities. The Commissioner’s office is funded from the budget for Merseyside Police and is tasked with setting Merseyside’s policing priorities through a Police and Crime Plan which must be created in consultation with Merseyside Police’s Chief Constable. The commissioner is also required to set the police budget, produce an annual report, and work in partnership with Community Safety Partnerships. The Commissioner will be scrutinised by a Police and Crime Panel consisting of 10 councillors from the five Merseyside local authorities, and two independent members.

For more information go to www.merseysidepcc.info
Council and Chamber join forces to get young people into work

A new programme launched by St Helens Council and St Helens Chamber to help local young people become "work ready" has seen its first 10 candidates successfully complete the programme and secure employment.

The new programme, which launched in September, is funded by St Helens Council and delivered by St Helens Chamber’s Starting Point Education team and aims to support 140 local 16-18 year olds who may otherwise not be considered for jobs, to prove the valuable contribution they can make to local businesses and secure paid Apprenticeships.

Reform of Key Stage 4 qualifications

In September 2012 the government set out proposals to reform the examination system at Key Stage 4. The government intends to replace current GCSEs in the core academic subjects with new qualifications called English Baccalaureate Certificates. The system will move away from competition between awarding organisations, with a single suite of qualifications offered by one awarding body. It is expected that schools will start teaching these new qualifications in English, maths and the sciences from 2015, with the first exams sat in 2017.

For more information go to www.education.gov.uk

Heseltine’s growth report

Lord Heseltine has published an independent report on creating economic growth. The report identifies structural flaws in the country’s economic development governance which weakens the potential for growth and recommends passing more responsibility for deciding how funding is spent from central government to a local level. Central to the report’s idea is to bring separate funding streams for growth into a single funding pot for local areas including a significant part of the skills budget, infrastructure, employment support, housing, regeneration and business support. Local partnerships would bid for these funds on a competitive basis, free from central government control to implement their local strategies.

The Chancellor’s Autumn Statement set out a commitment to formally respond to the recommendations of the report in the spring, and announced a number of initial measures. The front page article on the Autumn Statement contains details of these initial measures.

For more information go to www.bis.gov.uk

EU post-2013 structural funding

The current European Union Funding Programme ran from 2007 and is due to end in December 2013. This funding programme has been the main European instrument for supporting local projects to increase employment and economic growth. As the EU budget for 2014-2020 has not yet been finalised, the government has been working with stakeholders across the UK to ensure that future funding programmes will be simpler to access.

Local Enterprise Partnerships will be key to the distribution of EU funds in the future, as they bring together local authorities and businesses, LEPs will be best placed to design and deliver investment strategies that target the needs of their local areas.

A formal consultation will be launched in spring 2013.

For more information go to www.bis.gov.uk
**National consultation on Children’s Centres**

Changes are likely to be made to way that government expects Children’s Centres to operate in the future, and how Ofsted will conduct inspections. Children’s Centres will become more focused on ‘improving outcomes for young children and their families, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged families’ to reduce inequalities.

Ofsted published a consultation, signalling that they will make significant changes to way they inspect Children’s Centres. These changes are likely to include Ofsted carrying out a number of inspections simultaneously across a local authority area, and reducing the number of judgements from 20 to 3: access to services, quality and impact of services, and effective leadership.

*For more information go to www.ofsted.gov.uk*

**Consultation of cutting alcohol fuelled crime**

The Home Office are consulting on plans to cut alcohol fuelled crime and anti-social behaviour. The plans for a minimum price on alcohol have been well publicised in the media, however the consultation specifically seeks views on five key areas: a ban on multi-buy promotions in shops and off licenses; a review of mandatory licensing conditions; health as a new alcohol licensing objective; cutting red tape for responsible businesses; and minimum unit pricing for alcohol. This is in response to evidence that increasing the price of alcohol reduces consumption, leading to reductions in alcohol-related harm, particularly to health. Whilst the government wishes to promote local decision making, it believes there are circumstances when national action is appropriate to support the reduction of alcohol-related harm. The consultation closes on 13 February 2013.

*For more information go to www.homeoffice.gov.uk*

**Market oversight in adult social care consultation**

The Department of Health has published a consultation on proposals to strengthen oversight of the social care market. The consultation has two elements: further measures needed to strengthen and clarify the responsibility of local authorities in relation to care users in the event of a care provider failure; and whether a targeted model of central oversight would be appropriate. The government considers that the majority of local markets should continue to be overseen by local authorities, with a central oversight regime applying where the size or scale of service provision makes it difficult for an individual local authority to ensure people continue to receive the care they need if that organisation fails. The consultation closes on 1 March 2013.

*For more information go to www.dh.gov.uk*
St.Helens Together Policy News is a newsletter aimed at keeping local partners and community members up to date with national and local policy initiatives.

We provide relevant information for each of the LSPs thematic groups. If you have any questions or want to contribute to Policy News you can contact us using the email address on the left.

Performance of indicators against the key priorities in the St.Helens Plan 2012-15 showed that 63% were on target at the end of November 2012. There has been strong and/or improving performance in a number of areas, including:

- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment launched and a draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy presented to the Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board.
- Work underway towards the transfer of public health responsibilities to the council in April 2013.
- The re-presentation rate of Drugs Intervention Programme clients has reduced, indicating success of the “test on arrest” scheme and the referral pathway for drug treatment.
- Provisional data for 2011/12 indicates 66% of children reached a “good level of development” at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, 87% of Key Stage 2 pupils achieved Level 4 in English and Maths and 98.5% of A-level students achieved grades A-E pass rates.
- Provisional GCSE results for 2011/12 show that 55.3% of pupils achieved 5 or more grades A*-C including English and Maths, which is less than last year (55.7%). There is some controversy regarding the marking of this year’s GCSE English papers and an enquiry is ongoing.
- The proportion of adults qualified to Level 2 is now above the NW average and only 1% below the national average.
- The number of serious acquisitive crimes from Apr-Nov is 8% lower than the same period last year.
- There has been a 10% reduction in the number of anti-social behaviour calls to the Police compared to Apr-Nov last year.

The partnership faces a number of challenges to maintain and improve service delivery including:

- Effective delivery of the Troubled Families Programme, following guidance by government released in September 2012.
- Analysis of the 2012 Annual Residents’ Survey to gauge perceptions of crime / ASB and feelings of safety to set next year’s priorities for the Community Safety Partnership.
- Promotion of carbon reduction and energy efficiency following the launch of the government’s Green Deal programme on 1st October 2012. A scrutiny review of recycling is being undertaken.
- Mitigating the impact of Welfare Reform to ensure the most vulnerable continue to receive support. LSP Members are working up action plans of measures required to minimise impact of changes.
- Review of Public Health Services contracts – priorities are health checks in primary care and the Health Improvement Team.
- Providing support to schools to ensure that they meet Ofsted standards.