



**Children Young People and Families
Policy and Performance Board**

**Monday, 20 July 2020 at 6.30pm
Via remote access (please contact below
for instructions)**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'David W R'.

Chief Executive

BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Councillor Mark Dennett (Chair)	Labour
Councillor Geoffrey Logan (Vice-Chair)	Labour
Councillor Marjorie Bradshaw	Conservative
Councillor Chris Carlin	Labour
Councillor Lauren Cassidy	Labour
Councillor Pauline Hignett	Labour
Councillor Rosie Leck	Labour
Councillor Peter Lloyd Jones	Labour
Councillor John Stockton	Labour
Councillor Angela Teeling	Labour
Councillor Louise Whitley	Labour

*Please contact Ann Jones on 0151 511 8276 or e-mail
ann.jones@halton.gov.uk for further information.
The next meeting of the Board is on Monday, 14 September 2020*

**ITEMS TO BE DEALT WITH
IN THE PRESENCE OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Part I

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1. MINUTES	1 - 7
2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST (INCLUDING PARTY WHIP DECLARATIONS)	
Members are reminded of their responsibility to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Other Disclosable Interest which they have in any item of business on the agenda, no later than when that item is reached or as soon as the interest becomes apparent and, with Disclosable Pecuniary interests, to leave the meeting during any discussion or voting on the item.	
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In accordance with the Health and Safety at Work Act the Council is required to notify those attending meetings of the fire evacuation procedures. A copy has previously been circulated to Members and instructions are located in all rooms within the Civic block.

CHILDREN YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Children Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board on Monday, 27 January 2020 in the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Dennett (Chair), Logan (Vice-Chair), M. Bradshaw, Carlin, Cassidy, Leck, P. Lloyd Jones, J. Stockton, Teeling and Whitley

Apologies for Absence: None

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: A. McIntyre, A. Jones, T. Coffey, D. Roberts, S. Williams, H. Bell and L. Davenport

Also in attendance: None

**ITEMS DEALT WITH
UNDER DUTIES
EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD**

	<i>Action</i>
CYP23 MINUTES	
<p>The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2019 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.</p>	
CYP24 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME	
<p>The Board was advised that no public questions had been received.</p>	
CYP25 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES	
<p>The minutes relating to the Children, Education and Social Care Portfolio, that had been considered by the Executive Board since the last meeting of this Board, were attached at Appendix 1 for information.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.</p>	
CYP26 SSP MINUTES	
<p>The minutes relating to the Halton Children's Trust meetings held on 31 October 2019 and 3 December 2019 were presented to the Board for information.</p>	

RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.

CYP27 ANNUAL REPORT - COMMENTS, COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS RELATING TO CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 1ST APRIL 2018 - 31ST MARCH 2019

The Board was presented with the Annual Reports for Comments, Complaints and Compliments relating to Children's Social Care Services from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019. The report provided analysis on complaints processed under the *Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure*, and evidenced how feedback from service users had been used to improve service delivery.

It was reported that the aim of the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure was for children and young people to have their concerns resolved swiftly and wherever possible, by the people who provided the service locally. It was noted that a complaint may generally be defined as an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual child or young person, which required a response.

Members were advised that there were four categories to the representation process: Statutory Complaints; Representations; Customer Care Issues; and Compliments. Commentary on these were provided in the report which also presented detailed information and data relating to the numbers of complaints received between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019.

Members queried:

- The meaning of partially upheld – when a complaint consisted of more than one part, for example if a complaint had 5 parts to it, 3 could be upheld and 2 could be not upheld;
- How does a young person actually make a complaint – there were the usual routes via telephone and email and more recently via text. Sometimes a relative or friend would do it for them. When a complaint was made the complainant was visited by a caseworker and every effort would be made to resolve the matter without engaging the formal process; and
- In 2016/17 the number of complaints was relatively low in comparison with 2018/19 – this could be due to having a more stable workforce in place at that time.

On behalf of the Board the Chair welcomed the

positive comments and compliments they had read in the annual report and passed on their thanks to all the staff involved in Children's Social Services for their hard work and dedication to their roles.

RESOLVED: That the reports be accepted as the mechanism by which Senior Management and Elected Members could monitor and scrutinise Children's Social Care complaints and compliments.

CYP28 ANNUAL HEADTEACHER'S REPORT OF THE ATTAINMENT AND PROGRESS OF HALTON'S CHILDREN IN CARE

The Board received the annual update of the education outcomes for Halton's Children in Care 2018-19. Appended to the report was the paper *End of Key Stage Attainment and Progress Report for Halton's Children in Care 2018-19*, which provided detailed data, analysis and impacts for the following groups; officers provided supporting commentary to explain the attainment results for each one:

- Reception;
- Phonics;
- Key Stage 1;
- Key Stage 2;
- Key Stage 4;
- Attendance and Exclusions; and
- Education, Employment and Training

Additionally, the Activity and Support Programme 2019-20 was attached for Members' information.

Members queried the status of the action plan referred to in paragraph 3.5 – this was being developed to improve overall outcomes for children in care and care leavers, with a particular focus on education, ensuring that there was full corporate ownership through this. It was reported that the action plan was in progress and the draft would be presented to Members of this Board as soon as it was ready.

The Board also discussed the importance of the PEP (Personal Education Plans) and frequency of them; the disparity between boys and girls attainment; the need for more mentors for children in care; the involvement of the educational psychologist service; training for foster carers; raising awareness via school governors and exclusions.

With regards to future reporting, the Chair requested more information on the cohort of Halton's children in care and information on any 'trends' at the time.

Director of
Children's
Services

RESOLVED: That the information is noted.

CYP29 HIGH NEEDS REVIEW

The Board received a presentation on the progress to date in reviewing, revising and redesigning High Needs processes and provision in Halton.

Officers presented the five recommendations made as a result of Phase 1 of the review. Members were advised that further to approval at Executive Board, Phase 2 of the project was commissioned and had begun and that this would concentrate on revising/redesigning the following:

- Inclusion within schools;
- Education Health Care Plans (EHCP);
- The Pupil Referral Unit (PRU); and
- Special schools and resource provision.

Members discussed the review's recommendations and welcomed the revisions going forward. They noted the next steps as follows:

- 29 January 2020 – parent and carer consultation on EHCP process;
- 13 February 2020 – PRU model to be considered at Halton Secondary Partnership meeting;
- 26 February 2020 – PRU model to be considered at the Education Strategic Board and Schools Forum;
- The development and finalisation of the plan for specialist provision for Executive Board approval; and
- Consultation with stakeholders.

Operational
Director -
Education,
Inclusion and
Provision

RESOLVED: That the presentation and information be noted and a further update be provided to the Board at the next meeting.

CYP30 UPDATE ON RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 2017/18 SCRUTINY TOPIC 'FURTHER DEVELOPING LINKS BETWEEN HALTON'S BUSINESSES AND SCHOOLS'

A report was presented to the Board from the Strategic Director – People, which provided an update on recommendations that were made in June 2018, as a

conclusion to the 2017-18 scrutiny topic '*Further developing links between Halton's Businesses and Schools*'.

The report outlined those recommendations and provided an update on the status of each, since they were made. Appended to the report were the online careers programmes (updated Autumn 2019) for each of the Borough's secondary schools; as discussed in paragraph 3.6.

In response to Members' queries on the update, the following additional information was provided:

- The *Gatesby Benchmarks* had been adopted by secondary schools and were now being used;
- There was no statutory duty on the Local Authority to enforce careers guidance in schools; Ofsted would be the body to provide recommendations if it was lacking;
- Ofsted would also inspect how inclusive careers guidance was within schools; and
- Pupils at The Bridge School (Pupil Referral Unit) each worked with their own case worker with regards to career guidance. The PRU also has good quality outcomes in relation to young people progressing into Post 16 Education or Training.

RESOLVED: That the Board notes the information provided.

CYP31 CHILDREN IN CARE PLEDGE

The Board received an update on the implementation of the *Pledge to Children in Care* and were asked to approve this. Appended to the report was a leaflet '*The Pledge*' containing The Pledge statements and a leaflet titled '*Coffee Drop*' which introduces drop in sessions at Macy's Café in Grangeway.

It was reported that corporate parents were the officers and Members of the Council, members of the Children's Trust and other partner agencies and that a good corporate parent must offer everything that a good parent would, including stability. It must address both the difficulties which children in care experienced and the challenges of parenting within a complex system of different services. This meant that children in care and care leavers should be cared about, not just cared for, and that all aspects of their development should be nurtured, requiring a corporate approach across all of the agencies involved in

the Children's Trust.

The report discussed the statutory roles of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services and the expectations of the improvements to be made to the role of corporate parents, as announced recently by the Government (described in paragraph 3.5).

The Board continued to recognise the importance of the Children in Care Pledge and Members' responsibilities as Corporate Parents. They agreed that the actions to support the Pledge be referred to Executive Board and then to Council for endorsement.

The Chair suggested that all Members of the Council be reminded of these commitments by way of a refreshed presentation at a full Council meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) endorse the Pledge;
- 2) endorse action to promote the Pledge so it is known to the Council, Children's Trust and other partners;
- 3) identify further actions to support the commitments to Children in Care; and
- 4) agree that the Pledge and actions to support the Pledge are referred to Executive Board and then to Council for endorsement.

Director of
Children's
Services

WAIVER OF STANDING ORDER NUMBER 50

The Chair requested the waiver of Standing Order number 50 so all agenda items could be presented. This was agreed by the Board and the meeting continued.

CYP32 CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE PERFORMANCE

The Board received a report from the Strategic Director – People, informing them of the key areas of Children's Social Care performance; how this was monitored and how Halton compared regionally and nationally.

The report provided details in the following key areas:

- The demand for contacts and referrals;
- Numbers of assessments and re-referrals;

- Children in Need (CIN);
- Child Protection;
- Children in Care; and
- Care Leavers.

Officers advised that overall the service was still under pressure as the level of work had continued to increase.

It was noted that the report provided Members with a basic summary of some of the key performance areas, as there were others not covered in the report. Members agreed that they would like to see those areas as well, so requested that for future reporting all the performance areas be included.

RESOLVED: That the report is noted.

Director of
Children's
Services

Meeting ended at 9.10 p.m.

REPORT TO: Children, Young People and Families Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 20 July 2020

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources

SUBJECT: Public Question Time

WARD(s): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To consider any questions submitted by the Public in accordance with Standing Order 34(9).
- 1.2 Details of any questions received will be circulated at the meeting.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That any questions received be dealt with.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Standing Order 34(9) states that Public Questions shall be dealt with as follows:-
- (i) A total of 30 minutes will be allocated for dealing with questions from members of the public who are residents of the Borough, to ask questions at meetings of the Policy and Performance Boards.
 - (ii) Members of the public can ask questions on any matter relating to the agenda.
 - (iii) Members of the public can ask questions. Written notice of questions must be given by 4.00 pm on the working day prior to the date of the meeting to the Committee Services Manager. At any one meeting no person/organisation may submit more than one question.
 - (iv) One supplementary question (relating to the original question) may be asked by the questioner, which may or may not be answered at the meeting.
 - (v) The Chair or proper officer may reject a question if it:-
 - Is not about a matter for which the local authority has a responsibility or which affects the Borough;
 - Is defamatory, frivolous, offensive, abusive or racist;

- Is substantially the same as a question which has been put at a meeting of the Council in the past six months; or
 - Requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information.
- (vi) In the interests of natural justice, public questions cannot relate to a planning or licensing application or to any matter which is not dealt with in the public part of a meeting.
- (vii) The Chair will ask for people to indicate that they wish to ask a question.
- (viii) **PLEASE NOTE** that the maximum amount of time each questioner will be allowed is 3 minutes.
- (ix) If you do not receive a response at the meeting, a Council Officer will ask for your name and address and make sure that you receive a written response.

Please bear in mind that public question time lasts for a maximum of 30 minutes. To help in making the most of this opportunity to speak:-

- Please keep your questions as concise as possible.
- Please do not repeat or make statements on earlier questions as this reduces the time available for other issues to be raised.
- Please note public question time is not intended for debate – issues raised will be responded to either at the meeting or in writing at a later date.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

None.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

None.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 **Children and Young People in Halton** - none.

6.2 **Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton** - none.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton** – none.

6.4 **A Safer Halton** – none.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal** – none.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 None.

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

8.1 There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act.

REPORT TO: Children, Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 20 July 2020

REPORTING OFFICER: Chief Executive

SUBJECT: Executive Board Minutes

WARD(s): Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Minutes relating to the Children and Young People Portfolio which have been considered by the Executive Board are attached at Appendix 1 for information.
- 1.2 The Minutes are submitted to inform the Policy and Performance Board of decisions taken in their area.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Minutes be noted.

3.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 None.

4.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

5.1 Children and Young People in Halton

None

5.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

None

5.3 A Healthy Halton

None

5.4 A Safer Halton

None

5.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

6.1 None.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 None.

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

8.1 There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act.

Extract of Executive Board Minutes relevant to the Children, Young Peoples and Families Policy and Performance Board

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 16 JANUARY 2020**EXB 67 | SCHOOL ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS 2021 – KEY DECISION**

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, People, on School Admission Arrangements for 2021.

The Board was advised that in October 2019, Halton Local Authority issued a statutorily required consultation on the proposed admission arrangements and co-ordinated admission schemes for the September 2021 intake. It was noted that the consultation ran until 8 November 2019, with no changes proposed to the current oversubscription criteria for admission to Local Authority maintained community and voluntary controlled primary schools. No responses to the consultation were received.

It was further noted that all Halton secondary schools were either academies, free schools or voluntary aided and were therefore their own admission authorities, with responsibility for consulting and determining their own admissions criteria and their own Published Admission Number (PAN).

The Board expressed its concerns that Government Policy in relation to school admission arrangements and Academy Schools, seriously limited the ability of the Council to respond to concerns expressed by parents about where their children went to school.

Reason(s) for Decision

The decision was statutorily required.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Other options considered and rejected included the allocation of places to community and voluntary controlled schools through random allocation (lottery), as this method could be seen as arbitrary and random.

Implementation Date

The Policy and co-ordinated schemes would apply for the September 2021 academic intake.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Board approves the School Admissions Policy, Admission Arrangements and Co-ordinated Schemes for admission to primary and secondary schools for the 2021/22 academic year;
- 2) where appropriate, schools be invited to increase their numbers to help support the Council to help meet the preference of parents about where their children attend school;
- 3) schools be invited to take advantage of funding available to them from Government to increase their buildings to accommodate increased pupil numbers where necessary; and
- 4) the Leader, on behalf of the Executive Board, write to Mr Twigg M.P. and Mr Amesbury M.P. to seek their support in respect of school admissions arrangements in Halton.

EXB 68	SCHOOLS CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2020-21 – KEY DECISION
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The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, People, which provided a summary of the Schools Capital Programmes for 2020/21.

The Board was advised that the Department for Education (DfE) had not yet announced the Capital Grant Allocation for 2020/21 at the time of writing the report. However, given the timescales for some of the capital projects, the report used the 2019/20 allocation as the basis for presenting the report to the Board.

The report set out details of the indicative funding available to support capital projects across the school estate as well as how the School Condition Allocation would be utilised.

Reason(s) for Decision

To deliver and implement the Capital Programmes.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Implementation Date

Capital Programmes for 2020/21 would be implemented with effect from 1 April 2020.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the position regarding capital funding from the Department for Education for 2020/21, be noted;

- 2) the proposals to be funded from the School Condition Capital Allocation, be approved; and
- 3) Council be recommended to approve the Capital Allocations for inclusion in the Budget report.

EXB 69	INTEGRATED, UNIVERSAL, TARGETED AND SPECIALIST YOUTH PROVISION POST JULY 2020
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The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, People, on a proposed integrated universal and targeted youth provision contract.

The Board was advised that the Education Act 1986 (updated in 2008), set out the statutory requirements for local authorities to provide youth work in three areas – positive activities; decision making by young people; and 14-19 learning.

It was reported that the continued reduction in youth services had come at a time when those services were most needed, with the risk of child poverty and material deprivation in the UK on the rise in recent years. Members were advised that Halton had a long history of providing young people with opportunities to develop their own unique talents and to access early help.

It was noted that Halton Youth Provision worked together with a range of agencies to help young people through early intervention and offering a range of support to prevent problems from getting worse. It was proposed that the Integrated Youth Service would have an indicative budget of £633,527 per annum, split across three core functions as detailed in the report.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) note the report; and
- 2) approve the procurement of the new integrated, universal, targeted specialist youth provision for a three year contract with the option to extend for a further 1 plus 1 year.

EXB 70	THE FUNDING FORMULA FOR MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS AND HIGH NEEDS FOR 2020/21
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The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, People, which outlined the proposal for the Dedicated Schools Grant Schools Block Funding Formula for Halton, for mainstream schools and academies for 2020/21.

The Board was advised that the Dedicated Schools Grant was split into four blocks. In July 2017, the Secretary of State confirmed the introduction of the National Funding Formula from April 2018, which calculated the Schools Block element for Halton.

It was reported that after consultation with schools and the Schools Forum, it was decided that Halton mainstream schools and academies would move to the National Funding Formula with transitional protection for 2018/19, as detailed in the report.

On 11 December 2019, a report which highlighted the key changes to the funding of mainstream schools and academies was presented to the meeting of the Schools Forum. Following consultation in November 2019, it was reported that the majority of schools supported the proposal that Schools Forum make a decision on the appropriate level for the Minimum Funding Guarantee at their meeting in January 2020.

Members noted that the grant allocations announced on 19 December 2019, showed an increase of £2.29m to the High Needs Block for 2020/21 compared to the 2019/20 allocation.

RESOLVED: That the Board approves the continuation of the National Funding Formula for 2020/21.

REPORT TO: Children and Families, Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 20 July 2020

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, People

PORTFOLIO: Children, Education & Social Care

SUBJECT: Inspection of Authority Children Services (ILACS)

WARDS: All

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To share the findings of the recent Inspection of Authority Children Services (ILACS) in Halton and its recommendations.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION:

2.1 **Members note the findings and invite comments on the initial action plan.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 OfSTED conducted a standard inspection under the ILACS framework from 2 March to 13 March 2020.

3.2 OfSTED had previously inspected Halton under the Joint targeted inspection of the multi-agency response to children experiencing or at risk of exploitation, including sexual and criminal exploitation, between 8th and 12th July 2019 and a short focused inspection on the arrangements for contacts and referrals in the integrated contact and referral team (iCART) and thresholds for children in need and child protection, with a focus on children and families stepping down to early help between 24 and 25 July 2018.

3.3 The ILACS inspection provides a Judgement across four areas and Halton was deemed to require improvement to be good across all areas.

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement to be good

- 3.4 The inspection team found that we had made positive improvements in some areas of the service since the previous inspections. Most importantly they found no children in immediate harm or at risk of immediate harm and that children were safe.
- 3.5 Other areas of strength were on strategic planning that has resulted in effective early intervention services, a strengthened initial response to children needing help and protection and strong arrangements to tackle extra-familial risk.
- 3.6 Slower progress has been made in some areas, and in contrast to the focused visit inspectors judged that decision making at the front door was inconsistent. Other areas for improvement include decision making in situations where children are living in situations of chronic neglect and having a too optimistic view of parental ability to change. Consistency of the quality of work was a feature across the service and that this was hampered by issues of capacity and the need to have a more robust quality assurance framework.
- 3.7 Inspectors did recognise that we had lost some key managers and that as new team we are in a strong position to affect change.
- 3.8 Ofsted identified 5 main areas for improvement and listed them in the following order:
- Consistency of application of thresholds and understanding of parental consent in iCART.
 - Quality of assessments, and plans, including personal educational plans (PEPs) and contingency planning.
 - Management oversight, challenge and supervision, to support consistent, good-quality social work practice.
 - The sufficiency of high-quality placements to meet children's needs.
 - Strategic planning to support service improvement.
- 3.9 In response to these recommendations we have submitted a draft plan to OFSTED as per requirements of the ILAC framework. The plan is split into two phases. The first phase was done to reflect the changes and actions required to respond to COVID 19. The second phase are longer term actions.
- 3.10 Although 'strategic planning to support improvement' is the last of the recommendations strategic planning it will underpin all that needs to be done and clarify our direction and outline our measurable goals to achieve improvement in the other four areas.
- 3.11 A key feature of the plan that is proposed is to have a partnership board "Working for Children" to provide the vehicle for partner contribution and will be supported by the LGA to provide additional oversight, critical and independent challenge and ensure evidence based progress and secure accurate self-evaluation.

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Having a strong and robust framework for identifying and responding across all agencies is the key to ensuring that children and young people are safe and protected, and partners are clear about their responsibilities and role in working together.

6.2 Employment and Learning Skills in Halton

None

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Children and young people whose health needs and level of development is potentially compromised are identified early and multi-agency support is in place to support them.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Children who are at risk of harm are identified quickly and services work together to minimise the risk of harm and take action to formally protect children in a timely way.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None identified.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 All key stakeholders are committed to working together to address the areas of development identified by the different inspectorates. This will ensure a most robust and consistent approach across the partnership to child exploitation in Halton.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 Issues arising from a child's equality and diversity needs will inform the decision-making at the point of contact and it will be ensured that the voice of the child is to the forefront.

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

There are no relevant background documents to this report.

Halton Borough Council

Inspection of local authority children's services

Inspection dates: 2 March 2020 to 13 March 2020

Lead inspector: Shabana Abasi
Her Majesty's Inspector

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement to be good

Since the last inspection of the local authority children's services under the single inspection framework (SIF) in November 2014, the focused visit in July 2018 and the joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) in July 2019, the local authority has made positive improvements in some service areas. Focused strategic planning and an understanding of the need to prioritise areas of higher risk have resulted in effective early intervention services, a strengthened initial response to children needing help and protection and strong arrangements to tackle extra-familial risk.

Slower progress has been made in other aspects of the service, and weaknesses found during this inspection mirror some of those areas requiring improvement in the SIF inspection. The application of thresholds in the integrated contact and referral team (iCART) is not always consistent, and the need to seek or dispense with parental consent is not fully understood or recorded. Some children remain living in situations of chronic neglect for too long before decisive action is taken. The management oversight of work with children within the pre-proceedings process has recently been strengthened, but is not yet sufficiently robust to

ensure that decisions are always made within a timescale that is right for children. Private fostering arrangements are not consistently identified and assessed. Effective management oversight and challenge are not sufficiently embedded in all service areas.

A focused approach to recruitment and retention and a commitment to increasing staffing capacity have resulted in greater workforce stability, for both management and frontline staff. Following a period of senior management instability, a newly formed senior leadership team is in a better position to accelerate the pace of improvement.

1

What needs to improve

- Consistency of application of thresholds and understanding of parental consent in iCART.
- Quality of assessments, and plans, including personal educational plans (PEPs) and contingency planning.
- Management oversight, challenge and supervision, to support consistent, good-quality social work practice.
- The sufficiency of high-quality placements to meet children's needs.
- Strategic planning to support service improvement.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: requires improvement to be good

1. Children and families who need help at an early stage have access to a comprehensive range of services to support their needs. Well-coordinated packages of support build family resilience and improve the experiences of children. When need and concerns increase, children's cases are appropriately stepped up from early intervention so that they receive a statutory social work service.
2. The iCART provides an accessible single point of contact for families and professionals seeking advice and support and seeking to make a referral to children's social care. The co-location of partner agencies in iCART helps ensure prompt and appropriate sharing of information to support decisions about next steps and the safeguarding of children.
3. When children need a social work assessment, most are transferred from iCART to child in need and child protection teams appropriately and without delay. However, the criteria for making decisions about the thresholds at which children receive different levels of intervention and services are not always consistently applied in iCART. For a small number of children, the initial assessment of need is not robust, resulting in children's cases being signposted to early help when a social work assessment of their needs would have been appropriate. This means that children and families do not always receive the right help at the right time. The purpose and practice of obtaining parental consent is not fully understood and not always well recorded. In some cases, information is sought and shared by iCART with agencies without informed parental consent.
4. When children are at risk of significant harm, they receive a prompt and effective response. Their needs are prioritised, and cases are swiftly transferred for a child protection response. When children are referred outside office hours, the emergency duty team responds appropriately to contacts and communicates efficiently with iCART. Records are completed promptly, show the actions taken and provide the detail of what further work is required by the day service.

5. Timely and well-attended multi-agency child protection strategy meetings, effective information-sharing and an effective focus on risk are leading to appropriate decisions and actions to protect children.
6. Social work assessments are not of a consistently good quality. While the majority are detailed and identify risk, this is not rigorously analysed and the impact on the child is not fully considered. This impacts on the quality of subsequent plans.
7. Disabled children benefit from comprehensive assessment of their needs, which leads to strong planning and child-centred interventions for children and families. This means that disabled children are safeguarded effectively through prompt recognition and response to risk.
8. Plans are not always clear about the outcomes desired or timescales for actions to be completed, and they lack detail about contingency planning. Some plans are overly focused on adults. This means that actions to address risk and improve children's circumstances are not always as effective as they could be or completed in a timely way. Managers are not always challenging the quality of poorer assessments and plans, and this is hindering improvements in practice. Senior managers are aware of these weaknesses and are addressing this through practice workshops. Plans are in place to strengthen practice through the further roll-out of the preferred social work model, which is not fully embedded.
9. Children are seen regularly and in accordance with their needs. Home visits are purposeful, and direct work undertaken with children enables social workers to understand children's daily experiences.
10. Multi-agency reviews take place regularly and are well attended. However, when some children's circumstances do not change, there is not always a sufficiently swift response to address this. Managers and child protection chairs are not challenging drift appropriately in these cases, and this creates delay for some children in receiving a more protective response. Not all plans are sharply focused on what needs to change. For some children, an over-optimism by social workers and managers about parental capacity to sustain change has meant that cases have been stepped down prematurely to lower levels of intervention.
11. Pre-proceedings work has recently started to have an impact on the timeliness of cases that need to progress to care proceedings or that need a lower level of intervention. The new arrangements in place show more effective management oversight. However, for some children, progress in this area has been too slow, and critical challenge provided by managers and child protection chairs has not been robust or effective. As a result, some children have remained in situations of neglect for too long.

12. Children at home or in care who go missing, or who are at risk of exploitation, receive robust, well-coordinated strategic and operational multi-agency support to help reduce risks. Effective multi-agency working ensures that all intelligence is shared and that links with other vulnerable young people are identified. This enhances risk management and the planning of support. When children have been missing, return home interviews are timely and the information gathered is used effectively to inform safety planning.
13. There are well-embedded systems and robust management oversight for tracking, assessing and safeguarding children who are missing or at risk of missing education. Children who are home educated are monitored effectively by the education welfare service and supported if their circumstances change.
14. There is not a consistently robust response to 16 to 17-year-olds presenting as homeless. Assessments of need are not sufficiently comprehensive. This means that not all young people receive an appropriate and timely response to meet their needs. Private fostering is not well understood. Children living in these arrangements are not promptly identified in order to ensure that their needs are assessed and they are safeguarded effectively in a timely way. The local authority has firm plans to address both these areas of practice.
15. The monitoring of allegations against adults working with children is undertaken by a number of independent reviewing managers (IRMs) working in the role of designated officer. This is not supporting consistently good oversight of the progression of cases. Although initial responses to risk are appropriately managed, senior managers are aware that the current arrangements are not as effective as they could be, and are implementing plans to improve the practice and processes underpinning this work.

The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers: requires improvement to be good

16. Decisions for children to come into care are mostly timely and in the best interests of children. However, for a small number of children for whom there are long-standing concerns about neglect, earlier opportunities to intervene are being missed.
17. Permanence planning for children is routinely considered from an early stage. Children who are unable to return to their birth families are supported to live with foster carers, or connected-person carers, including under Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs). Pre-birth assessments are of a good quality and inform early permanence planning well. Viability assessments of potential carers for children from within their extended family networks are timely, providing a clear analysis of risk, strengths and the capacity to meet children's needs and to protect them.

18. When children return home from care, this is informed by appropriate assessments and careful transition planning. Good support packages and regular monitoring ensure that children's needs are met, that risks are reduced, and that children continue to be safeguarded and protected.
19. Children in care are visited regularly by their social workers, who also see them on their own when this is appropriate to their age and circumstances. Most social workers know their children well. Most direct work undertaken with children is of a high quality. However, for a small number of children, direct work is limited due to the competing demands of some social workers' caseloads. This means that children's experiences are not always fully understood.
20. Comprehensive and well-written social work reports for reviews support detailed care planning. Most children have up-to-date care plans that are regularly reviewed and well informed by children's views. However, they do not all contain contingency plans, and so alternative permanence options are not always well considered.
21. Most children make meaningful contributions to their reviews. Advocacy and independent visitor support are appropriately considered within reviews. Most reviews are regular, child-focused, well attended and measure the progress of children's plans. However, IRMs do not consistently provide challenge, and this means that, for a small number of children, planning lacks pace and focus.
22. Arrangements for children to spend time with their families and other people who are important to them are well considered and promoted. This means that children are able to maintain and develop significant relationships. Children are supported by their carers and social workers to engage in hobbies and interests. This encourages children to broaden their experiences.
23. Since the JTAI, improvements have been made in meeting children's physical and emotional health and well-being needs. The emotional well-being panel provides a high-quality, multi-agency approach to providing mental health support. There are a range of effective services to provide support to children at risk of child exploitation and that help reduce risks.
24. The virtual school has a positive presence and is held in high regard by schools. It has an accurate picture of strengths and areas for improvement, and a number of new initiatives have been implemented to improve educational outcomes for children in care. However, the impact of these initiatives is not yet evident, for example from the work to improve children's attainment at key stage 4. Children's personal education plans at key stage 1 and key stage 2 are completed thoroughly and well. However, children's personal educational plans at other key stages are too variable, and some lack clear targets for improvement and do not support educational planning effectively.

25. Most children are living in placements that are meeting their needs and are helping them to make good progress, including those in specialist provision and placed outside the local authority. Some children have to wait too long to be matched with foster carers. As a result, a few of these children are experiencing ongoing insecurity and anxiety about their future care. Senior managers have recently introduced tracking systems to ensure that historical delays are addressed and permanence decisions for children in long-term foster care are made within children's timescales.
26. Placement sufficiency is a challenge that the local authority is aware of. Concerted efforts in the last 18 months have seen a small increase in the number of foster carers. Foster carers speak positively of the support and training they receive from the fostering service. Placement choice remains limited, and, as a result, a small number of children have been placed in unregistered settings. The commissioning arrangements for these placements have not been sufficiently robust to ensure quality in all cases.
27. For most children whose plan is adoption, permanence is achieved promptly. Decision-making for adoption is well informed and well documented. Assessments are thorough and there are a range of support initiatives to ensure that adoption support is available when families need it. Most child permanence reports and life-story work are of sufficiently good quality. Brothers and sisters are placed together unless assessments indicate that they would benefit from being placed apart.
28. Care leavers are supported effectively by personal advisers who know them well. Personal advisers maintain contact at a level that is appropriate to young people's needs. Most care leavers have up-to-date pathway plans, which clearly reflect their views, identify needs and the necessary actions to address these. Care leavers receive practical support to help them develop their independence skills. They have access to a broad range of services, and are supported well with education, employment or training needs, as well as emotional and physical health issues. Care leavers live in suitable accommodation and are supported well in their placements. The local authority has plans to further improve the choice available for 16 to 18-year-old care leavers. There has been a reduction of care leavers in employment, education or training (EET). The local authority is seeking to improve the range of opportunities available.
29. The children in care council (CICC) is a vibrant and energetic group, and the members are very positive about the activities they are increasingly involved in, as well as the opportunities they have had to contribute to further improving services.

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: requires improvement to be good.

30. Leaders have prioritised and implemented changes that have resulted in solid improvements being made to some services provided to children and families. Arrangements in the iCART have been strengthened, ensuring that multi-agency information-sharing is efficient and effective and supports the safeguarding of children. The scale and effectiveness of early intervention services is resulting in more children and families having access to timely and appropriate support. This is improving children's experiences and avoiding the need for statutory intervention when this is appropriate. Children at risk of exploitation and going missing receive a robust service that is helping to reduce risk.
31. A lack of consistent effective strategic oversight of all areas of practice means that there are still some core areas of social work practice that require further improvement to ensure that children and families get a consistent response. These include children's assessments, plans, management oversight and case supervision. Senior managers' plans to address some of the practice deficits have been hindered by workforce instability, social workers' workloads and sometimes a lack of critical self-challenge.
32. The safeguarding and children in care partnership boards and scrutiny committee provide relevant oversight of, and challenge to, operational services when deficiencies are highlighted. Senior leaders are held accountable for the performance of services and the experience and progress that children make.
33. There is a whole-council commitment to improving services for children and families. Significant investments have been made to increase workforce capacity, early intervention services and commissioned services. Although leaders across the local authority have an overall understanding of strengths and weaknesses in children's social care, they do not have a full understanding of the scale of improvement required to provide consistently good services to children and families.
34. The local authority's self-assessment is overly positive, presenting a picture of where it would like services to be, rather than where they are currently. Senior managers know that practice remains variable, but there is no overarching transformation plan to drive effective service improvement. The local authority has ambition and capacity to improve services for children and families, but more needs to be done to embed the quality of practice so that all children receive a consistent response to meet their needs.
35. Senior leaders and managers have access to comprehensive performance management information. However, turnover of frontline and senior managers in the last year has meant that performance culture is not sufficiently embedded. It is positive that leaders have recognised and addressed workforce instability and

inexperience and now have the capacity to take this forward, but this will take time to embed.

36. Quality assurance activity is not wholly effective. A focus on measuring compliance rather than quality of practice means that frontline managers do not always make an accurate evaluation of social work practice and what this means for children. Senior managers have recognised this, and a revised quality assurance framework is being implemented. It is too soon to see an impact on practice.
37. Management oversight of frontline practice, including by child protection chairs and IRMs, is not always leading to timely planning for children. Case supervision does not evidence sufficient challenge or reflection about weaker practice and, in some cases, the focus of supervision is on the process rather than the impact for children.
38. Social workers feel well supported by accessible managers and have access to a wide range of appropriate training. They are positive about working for Halton. Consistent challenge to support practice improvements is less well embedded. While most social workers' caseloads are manageable, some social workers have higher caseloads. The volume and complexity of their workloads mean that some social workers are not able to spend as much time with children as they need, and their ability to clearly record children's progress is reduced. In some cases, this causes delay in securing the best outcomes for children. Senior managers have firm plans to address equity in workloads.

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Halton Children Services Post OFSTED Action Plan



Introduction

Link to - [Halton ILACS Report Letter](#) Inspection dates: 2 March 2020 to 13 March 2020

In March 2020, Ofsted carried out a comprehensive inspection of children's social care and early help in Halton. This was conducted under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services Framework (ILACS). The overall judgement was that services in Halton requires improvement to be good. The individual service judgements were as follows.

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on Social Work practice with children and families	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall Effectiveness	Requires improvement to be good

Whilst OFSTED did comment that *'Since the last inspection of the local authority children's services under the single inspection framework (SIF) in November 2014, the focused visit in July 2018 and the joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) in July 2019, the local authority has made positive improvements in some service areas. Focused strategic planning and an understanding of the need to prioritise areas of higher risk have resulted in effective early intervention services, a strengthened initial response to children needing help and protection and strong arrangements to tackle extra-familial risk'*, whilst these comments were positive these grades are not where we wanted to be.

Whilst these positive improvements have been made, OFSTED identified that slower progress had been made in other aspects of the service, and weaknesses found during this inspection mirrored some of those areas requiring improvement in the SIF inspection. Our improvement was a considerable achievement but we were aware that more needed to be done to ensure that standards continue to rise.

Ofsted identified 5 main areas for improvement and listed them in the following order;

- Consistency of application of thresholds and understanding of parental consent in iCART.
- Quality of assessments, and plans, including personal educational plans (PEPs) and contingency planning.
- Management oversight, challenge and supervision, to support consistent, good-quality social work practice.
- The sufficiency of high-quality placements to meet children's needs.
- Strategic planning to support service improvement.

Whilst 'strategic planning to support improvement' is at the end of this list it is the first area that needs to be addressed. The strategic planning will underpin all that needs to be done and clarify our direction and outline our measurable goals to achieve improvement in the other four areas. With this in mind the majority of our actions will fall under this header.

Before OFSTED arrived there were already plans in place to review our children social care workforce with stage 1 having already been completed i.e. Children in Need Team Widnes were relocated to Runcorn and the two new Divisional Managers were appointed and commenced their role the week prior to Ofsted's arrival.

Upon reflection, at the time of OFSTED's arrival it was felt that, had we had more time to move forward with our plans then perhaps Ofsted would have graded their judgements more favourably but again upon reflection, this was perhaps the most opportune time. Their feedback during the inspection and the report contained a wealth of analysis that provides the basis on which we can focus our future planning and provide us with a greater understanding of the scale of improvement required to provide consistently good services to children and families.

Governance and Accountability

The Director of Children Services with his senior management team will take responsibility for the delivery of our plan. We will monitor improvements in performance and practice, measuring progress of our plan quarterly at our Children Service Performance and Quality Meetings with Service Managers and through Performance and Quality Meetings with Team Managers and their staff.

As part of this plan we are establishing a "Working for Children' improvement board, which will be supported independently by the LGA and chaired by the Chief Executive. This will provide additional oversight, critical and independent challenge and ensure evidence based progress and secure accurate self-evaluation.

The Children, Young People & Families Policy and Performance Board will provide political scrutiny.

The strategies and plans that sit underneath this plan are monitored by existing Boards and governance structures.

Progress will be RAG rated using the following status.

RAG STATUS	
Action not started or started and behind target for completion	X
Progress on track	-
Progress delayed	↓
Ahead of timescale	↑
Action completed	✓

Whilst time frames have been added, due to COVID 19 there will need to be some flexibility to undertake the tasks.

Areas for Improvement

Strategic planning to support service improvement.

Quality of assessments, and plans, including personal educational plans (PEPs) and contingency planning.

PHASE 1 July-September 2020

	ACTION	LEAD	IMPACT	RESOURCES	TIMESCALE
A	Establish a “Working for Children Board” chaired by Chief Exec and supported by LGA.	DCS	Provide independent challenge and support for service improvement. Ensure accurate self-evaluation and provide assurance on progress of service improvement		September 2020
B	During the Covid 19 recovery phase, establish “bubble” pods of social workers to be in the office on a rota basis as part of workforce plan. Each “bubble” pod will have a dedicated practice lead to manage duty and assessment work for that week, provide direct support and supervision and increase the level of management oversight. One Principal Manager will be matched with each pod.	OD	Increased management oversight. Increased SW capacity. Manageable workloads QA process implemented Increased resilience during COVID 19	Additional capacity recruited for new bubble pod for duty and assessment function Managed team procured from SW Agency	July 2020-September 2020

	ACTION	LEAD	IMPACT	RESOURCES	TIMESCALE
	By the end of the recovery phase, the CIN service has been merged into one team, with a duty and assessment function and a safeguarding children function.				
C	Undertake appraisals with all qualified social workers and managers in line with their respective knowledge and skills statement. The appraisal process to include examples of casework, supervision and feedback from service users and other agencies.	DM / OD / DCS	<p>All qualified staff are clear about expectations of their respective roles and prepared for accreditation.</p> <p>The service has a clear framework for developing and embedding the quality of social work practice leading to improved outcomes for children and families.</p> <p>Development plans are in place where required and staff are supported to meet the identified areas with additional training and supervision within an agreed timescale.</p> <p>Structured appraisal and progression process ensures ongoing competence</p> <p>Senior Managers assured of workforce effectiveness which will inform workforce recruitment and service planning via the workforce development group.</p>	<p>Source independent practice improvement resource, e.g. LGA</p> <p>Practice Improvement resource to develop appraisal process, collate and analyse training and development needs to develop workforce development plan</p>	To be completed by 30 th September 2020

	ACTION	LEAD	IMPACT	RESOURCES	TIMESCALE
D	<p>Implement new integrated audit and quality assurance framework developed and based on effective practice elsewhere, including Leeds Model</p> <p>Senior managers' complete 12 audits per week and principal manager's quality assure casework daily against the issued practice standards for assessments, visits and plans.</p> <p>Practice improvement resource to ensure audit and quality assurance framework, to analyse themes and trends, track actions from audits and quality assurance activity and measure progress and effectiveness of improvement</p> <p>Regular DM QA meetings led by senior manager.</p>	DM SG	<p>The quality standards for practice are embedded and understood by all staff.</p> <p>This is evidenced through a structured framework which includes case files audits, themed audits, practice observations and feedback from children young people and families.</p> <p>Continued improvement is demonstrated through improved assessment and plans and improved outcomes for children</p> <p>All Senior managers assured by evidence based analyses of work quality and outcomes.</p> <p>Children and families receive the right support at the right time without delay.</p>	Practice improvement resource	September 2020
E	<p>Implement new case recording system</p> <p>System development has been completed with involvement of frontline staff</p>	DCS	<p>Staff are supported with case recording to evidence their practice and impact on children and families.</p> <p>Mobile access and IT supports direct work with children and families and flexible working for staff.</p>	Project Board in place with representatives from across the service, IT and finance.	6 September 2020

	ACTION	LEAD	IMPACT	RESOURCES	TIMESCALE
	<p>across all areas of the service.</p> <p>Comprehensive training plan in place.</p> <p>Super users identified to support training delivery and ongoing support.</p> <p>Identification of appropriate mobile technology for distribution to all SW.</p>		<p>The system supports the consistency of quality social work practice in its design and workflow.</p>	<p>Implementation team in place including support from OLM</p>	
F	<p>Implement practice development workshops.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments to be delivered in July 2020 • Plans in August 2020 • Private Fostering September 2020 <p>Actions and recommendations from workshops tracked and audited for impact</p>	OD	<p>Quality standards for practice are explicit and understood.</p> <p>Timely, clearly written, jargon-free and accurate case recording.</p> <p>Rationale for case activity and management decisions clear.</p> <p>Voice of child evident and written in consistent tense.</p> <p>Effective practice is shared and celebrated.</p>	<p>Practice Improvement resource to support principal team managers in planning and delivery of workshops and monitoring of impact and improvement as a result</p>	31 July 2020 and Ongoing
G	<p>Ensure PEPs for Early Years and Post 16 are reviewed to ensure consistency in quality, clear targets and expectations are set out.</p>	OD Ed / VHS	<p>100% of EY and Post 16 PEPs will have clear SMART targets that focus on raising achievement and include both short and long term educational planning.</p> <p>Through rigorous QA at least 80% of EY and Post 16 PEPs will have a quality assurance rating of Good or better.</p>	<p>Recruitment of additional staff, 2 planned.</p>	31 Dec 2021

	ACTION	LEAD	IMPACT	RESOURCES	TIMESCALE
	<p>Continue with DCS led Termly performance and QA reviews.</p> <p>PEP, EET and CiC outcomes and progress included in performance framework.</p>		<p>100% Post 16 CiC will have clear progression routes into Education, Employment and Training opportunities that meet their career aspirations.</p>		

PHASE 2 September 2020- March 2021

	ACTION	LEAD	IMPACT	RESOURCES	TIMESCALE
1	<p>Design and implement revised service delivery model.</p> <p>The service delivery model is informed by learning from Covid interim arrangements and ways of working that have made a difference to the outcomes for children and families.</p> <p>The model supports quality systemic social work practice, and build on learning from other areas with effective practice e.g., Kensington and Chelsea.</p>	OD	<p>Clear and agreed operating model for Early help and Social Care.</p> <p>Visible and evidenced management oversight.</p> <p>Appropriately trained and competent staff. Manageable Case loads</p> <p>Robust management oversight at all levels</p> <p>More direct work with families</p> <p>All indicators at least in-line with statistical neighbours</p>	<p>Increased staffing permanent capacity.</p> <p>Access to managed teams through SW Agency framework.</p>	To be in place no later than March 2021

	ACTION	LEAD	IMPACT	RESOURCES	TIMESCALE
	<p>All staff have access to training and development and this recorded clearly in their supervision.</p> <p>Reflective supervision model designed and implemented.</p> <p>All staff and managers have CPD based around the staff review completed in phase 1.</p>				
2.	<p>Establish workforce development group to review workforce strategy including recruitment, career development and progression, training and development plan and staff support and well-being.</p>	OD	<p>To ensure we have appropriate level of staffing, skills and experience across all service areas with clear recruitment and retention pathways.</p> <p>CPD opportunities clear and reviewed regularly informed by audit findings.</p>	Improved recruitment process.	Strategy to be in place by 31 30 December 2020
3.	<p>A strengths based conference model to be developed with support from the partnership, children and their families using the principles of systemic theory and practice.</p> <p>Work with customer insight team to collect service user feedback</p>	DM SG	<p>Conferences and plans will child focussed.</p> <p>Effectiveness of plans will be measured on the impact on the child</p> <p>What the child wants from their plan will be evident and will be used to develop the plan</p> <p>Fewer repeat child protection plans and in line with statistical neighbours</p> <p>Children, families and partners understood the conference process prior to the meeting and were able to contribute and develop a plan that they feel ownership of.</p>	IRMs, social care staff and other partners	31 March 2021

	ACTION	LEAD	IMPACT	RESOURCES	TIMESCALE
4.	<p>Review of the structure, service delivery model and capacity of the safeguarding unit including the LADO process and quality assurance functions for both CP and CIC</p> <p>Quarterly reports developed identifying themes from escalations. and</p>	DM SG	<p>Evidence of CP and CiC IRM footprint on the child's file of their oversight and challenge leading to improved outcomes.</p> <p>Escalation is applied where there are issues with practice or delay with a child's plan without delay</p> <p>Effective practice notifications will be shared in the relevant partnership meetings to inform practice improvement planning and partnership self-assessment.</p> <p>All partners receive consistent information and support in managing allegations to ensure children are safeguarded, investigations are tracked and monitored.</p> <p>LADO process is concluded based on evidence and professional judgement</p>	<p>HR</p> <p>Additional IRM capacity equivalent to 1.5 IRMs</p>	30 September 2020
5.	<p>Private fostering and homeless notifications to receive a consistent response to identification, assessment and safeguarding responses.</p> <p>A named principal manager will be responsible and accountable for each area for training and development of social care staff, awareness</p>	DM CIN	Statutory duties are met	Principal Managers	30 August 2020

	ACTION	LEAD	IMPACT	RESOURCES	TIMESCALE
	<p>raising with partners and tracking and monitoring the effectiveness of the response</p> <p>Quarterly reports on the identification and the quality of response to the senior management team</p>				
6.	<p>Social workers to complete systemic social work practice qualification.</p> <p>Managers to complete systemic supervisor training to support implementation and embedding of systemic model.</p> <p>QA framework includes audit of case files and supervision identifying application of systemic practice.</p>	OD	<p>Social workers are able to practice and evidence with assurance and confidence the way they work with families strengths, manage risk using the safe uncertainty approach and improves outcomes for children.</p> <p>Staff undertake more direct work with children and parents</p> <p>Supervision is recorded consistently.</p> <p>Recording shows reflective informed decision making.</p>	<p>Funding to meet cost of training in partnership with DfE Partners in Practice Programme</p> <p>Additional support from Centre for Systemic Work in embedding approach through onsite support</p> <p>Release to undertake training and study time by providing backfill cover</p>	September 2020 March 2021

Management oversight, challenge and supervision, to support consistent, good-quality social work practice.

	ACTION	LEAD	IMPACT	RESOURCES	TIMESCALE
7	<p>Management development and accountability is informed through training and development to meet the requirements of the systemic social work model as the service delivery model.</p> <p>10 managers undertaking systemic leadership training supporting 20 front-line staff nominated.</p> <p>2 Practice Leads and 3 Principal Managers nominated for RiP Practice supervisor programme</p> <p>The integrated audit and quality assurance framework implemented including supervision audits, observations, and casework audits.</p>	OD	<p>Staff are supported by consistent good management and quality supervision.</p> <p>Improved and consistent quality of social work practice that demonstrates a grip of casework outcomes.</p>	<p>Funding for systemic social work</p> <p>Nominations to Research in Practice programme</p>	<p>Systemic March 2021 RiP November 2020</p>
8	<p>Ensure all workers and staff have access to and are using Research in Practice to link current theory and research to practice.</p>	OD	<p>Assessment and plans will contain evidence of relevant research and theory.</p> <p>Managers will have increased capabilities to supervise, organise, plan, lead, motivate and evidence of regular management oversight and reflective supervision on all case files.</p>	<p>Practice Improvement resource to develop model of engagement that support application in practice and</p>	<p>31 December 2020</p>

			Evidence of impact will be reported to the senior manager QA group and the workforce development group	series of discussion workshops on key webinars and research	
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	ACTION	LEAD	IMPACT	RESOURCES	TIMESCALE
9	<p>Multi-agency assessment toolkit launched with range of evidenced based tools to support partners in making referrals and contact to both early intervention and social care.</p> <p>Schools placed in hubs.</p> <p>Briefings via hub conference calls, with Hubs having at least 2 sessions each by the end of term.</p>	DMCIN	<p>Referrals for both early intervention and social care are supported by a consistent application and use of the toolkit.</p> <p>Evidenced decision of appropriate pathways and actions meeting the concerns raised about a child.</p>	DM, iCART staff, partners	Completed
10	<p>iCART structure, roles and responsibilities reviewed to ensure appropriate level of oversight of the level of response.</p> <p>Weekly audits of contacts and referrals through multi-agency contact challenge meeting.</p>	DM CIN	<p>All contacts and referrals are overseen by a qualified social worker before a decision is made on the level of need.</p> <p>Evidence of parental consent is provided before progressing unless risk of immediate harm.</p> <p>Children receive the right level of response at the right level of need.</p>	DM, Principal Managers and Practice Lead in iCART	Completed

The sufficiency of high-quality placements to meet children's needs.

	ACTION	LEAD	IMPACT	RESOURCES	TIMESCALE
11	<p>Review and revise the current Sufficiency strategy and implement the Sufficiency Strategy (2021-2024) for children in care and care leavers and monitor impact.</p> <p>Progress will be reported to the Children In Care Partnership Board / Children In Care Council</p> <p>Specific requirements will be shared with providers.</p> <p>Continue to work implement LCR Market Reform programme, and specifically the social enterprise residential care business case.</p>	<p>DM (CIC/CL)</p> <p>DM (P)</p>	<p>There will be a continued increase in the number of local authority foster carers overall (5%) as well as an increase in the percentage of children in care placed in "in house" placements (5%)</p> <p>There will be an increase in the percentage of children in care placed within Halton or neighbouring authorities (5-10%)</p> <p>There will be an increase in the number of placement options available resulting in an increased choice to meet needs</p>	<p>Support from the Policy and performance team.</p> <p>Capital funding.</p>	<p>December 2020</p> <p>April 2021</p>
1	<p>Review and revise the existing procedure for contractual compliance / quality monitoring visits to external placements.</p>	<p>DM (DM P)</p>	<p>Robust arrangements are in place to ensure the quality of the commissioned placement.</p> <p>The workflow is based on a consistent risk assessment process</p>	<p>Placements Team</p>	<p>September 2020</p>

<p>Progress will be reported quarterly through the Governance Framework.</p> <p>Children in Care Young Inspectors used to provide young person perspective on placement quality.</p>		<p>At any time at least 80% of Residential and Leaving Care placements will have received at least one quality visit in the previous 12 months.</p> <p>Young person approved provision.</p>		
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Glossary:

Abbreviation	Title	Name
DCS	Director Children Services	Milorad Vasic
OD	Operational Director Children Social Care	Tracey Coffey
OD Ed	Operational Director Education	Ann McIntyre
DM (CIN)	Divisional Manger Children in Need	Angela Povey
DM (CIC/CL)	Divisional Manger Children in Care and Care Leavers	Liz Davenport
DM (P)	Divisional Manger Placements	Sam Murtagh
VHS	Virtual Head of School	Sharon Williams

REPORT TO:	Children, Young People & Families Policy & Performance Board
DATE:	20 th July 2020
REPORTING OFFICER:	Strategic Director, People
PORTFOLIO:	Children, Education & Social Care
SUBJECT:	Support for Children and Families during COVID 19
WARD(S)	All

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide members of the Board with an update on support provided to children and families during COVID 19.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION: That:**

- i) **Members note the contents of the report.**

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 **Introduction**

- 3.1.1 Although most staff have been working from home, throughout the lockdown the iCART has been in operation and there has been a rota of social work staff in the office ready to respond to any immediate safeguarding concerns. Similarly, early help staff have been operating from children centres and providing day care when needed along with other forms of family support either virtually or by visiting and observing social-distancing guidance.
- 3.1.2 All children in care, care leavers and those children with a child protection plan were risk assessed at the beginning of COVID and contact has been maintained either virtually or when deemed necessary by a physical visit.
- 3.1.3 We have provided up to date information on vulnerable children to the DfE as part of eth national monitoring programme.
- 3.1.4 Staff have been working hard throughout the period, and innovative ways of working with and supporting families were quickly established. This informal report summarises some of the key activities that have taken place since 23rd March 2020.

3.1.5 Set out below are summaries for each service area.

3.2 Early Help Services

3.2.1 Early Help and family support have pulled together a comprehensive suite of activities and a full report is available as annex to this report with family comments, examples of work for the Locality Teams include:

- Direct work sessions in local parks/wellbeing walks.
- Video calls with children to obtain wishes and feelings/complete CAF pack/direct work.
- Video calls with parents to complete parenting work, observe home conditions and complete CAF pack.
- CAF's held virtually; especially useful for parents with mental health issues as they feel more comfortable and may not feel able to attend in person under usual circumstances.
- Emailing resources, including links to useful websites to provide both educational resources and fun activities - Direct work completed via online platforms.
- Encouraging families to explore the outdoors in a safe and fun way, in line with government guidelines.
- Advice and guidance to support parents in managing the children at home in a positive environment.
- Offering emotional support on the phone and then been sending out the nurture resources to use at home and talk through with staff to implement measures.
- Support parents and young people to access support for their mental health during lockdown including Voice recordings made of relaxation exercises and stress busters sent via WhatsApp.
- Provided practical support for parents struggling financially through foodbanks and community shop and connecting them with local organisations providing food and other essentials and benefit issues.
- Providing physical resources for those who struggle to access online activities.
- Staff have been out for walks with young people and parents with young children which enables them to talk more freely without worrying about neighbours overhearing.
- Provide information on how to stay safe, how to occupy their family, how to establish routines and deal with conflict.
- Coordinate Multi Agency working remotely to ensure that plans of support are put in place and reviewed.
- Social distanced meetings held on school premises use of desks to appropriately position attendees.
- Support those with young families balancing lockdown life alongside the job and home schooling – particularly those of other key workers.

3.2.2 Halton Children Centre's (CC)

- Phone call support, families really benefitted from this as they reported feeling isolated. Increased the phone contact for single parent families in response to this. Families responded well to this and were very open to providing information about their issues & concerns.
- CAF/CiN meetings virtually
- One to One nurture via video/phone calls
- Play and positive interaction ideas and resources delivered to families
- Door step visits to families.
- Welcome screenings completed via telephone calls/video calls where possible.
- Supplied and delivered emergency food supplies.
- Play partners telephone support – this has been challenging as it would normally be delivered in the home and is about modelling good interactions. See more detailed report below on how we have developed it to be done virtually.
- HELPs service continuing and amended to fit in with covid regulations (see in detail below)
- Themed play bags to support child development and positive interactions – these have been planned in line with children's development and delivered to families homes.
- Easter Egg donations delivered to families
- Social media posts to signpost families, interact with them and keep families engaged.
- Online celebration of Book Trusts Pyjamarama
- Staff 'Keeping in touch' video
- Online Nursery Rhyme Competition
- Sunflower competition supported by local garden centre
- Facilitating CSC contacts
- Support with equipment - FNP
- Support Asylum Families

3.2.3 Halton HELPS (Home Safety Equipment)

- Free provision of equipment for vulnerable families
- Home safety checks by professionals done via telephone
- Range of home safety reminder posts on CC and HELPS Facebook pages – this was important as accidents in the home increased due to lockdown

3.3 **Disabled Children's Services (DCS)**

- ### 3.3.1
- Halton's Disabled Children Service works across the Borough providing Short Breaks Services to families of disabled children. We commission a range of short breaks services, complete

assessments, coordinate and review support packages and conduct parent carer needs assessments.

3.3.2 Since lockdown, the majority of our Short Breaks services have been suspended but our Providers have and our service have worked creatively to provide a service;

- Maintained weekly contact with families to provide advice and reassurance.
- We have developed a hub and spoke model where all of the families have had weekly contact via phone, text, email, Skype and Zoom from at least one agency
- DCS staff have provided advice and support on access to food, medication, behaviour management and activities etc.
- DCS have worked with the agencies to explore creative ways of alternative support including online activities and the purchase of toys and activities.
- Families who have access to support via a Personal Budget have been able to maintain a service if their Personal Assistant is available for work but if not we have supported them to use some funds in alternative ways as a temporary measure.
- We are currently working with Commissioners and commissioned services to establish a plan to phase in the return of services following appropriate risk assessments and discussions with families. During the next 3 months, whilst we anticipate that there will be more face to face delivery, this is still going to be significantly less than would usually be provided in the summer period. Providers are also planning how they might further extend their services in the autumn until Christmas. Further information will be provided on Halton's Local Offer website <https://localoffer.haltonchildrenstrust.co.uk/leisure/>

3.3.3 Health Engagement Service

- Pre-CAF's completed via phone contact, found that parents were able to use this time to really discuss their child at length, this also helped them to give thought to the impact on them and their family as a whole.
- Provided relevant advice and practical resources for families and young people. Emailing resources and useful links to appropriate websites to address the issues raised in referral from GP.
- Advice and guidance offered over the phone to support parents and family through the corona lockdown enabling them to cope a little better at home.
- Offering emotional support over the phone using listening skills to enable appropriate response to their situation and provide containment to families during this difficult time.
- Regular contact with families to offer support and families also

encouraged to contact Health Engagement Officer if they felt they needed support via phone, text, email ensuring communication was effective and appropriate for the family and their needs.

- Liaising with other support agencies to ensure consistency for the family such as:
CAMHS/Woodveiw/Chatterbug/Disability/school head teachers/ GP's and surgery support staff, this enable's linked up working and provides a better support system for the young person and family.
- Developed a range of resources, books, useful websites and information on a variety of key themes to support children, young people and their families including self-help information. These resources were also shared with colleagues within Halton Borough Council to benefit a wider catchment of families to ensure information was disseminated and families have access to information and advice online.
- Sent out resource worksheets covering many different issues to help them with behaviour/emotions/routines/boundaries etc. which could be accessed at home by families during lockdown.
- Liaising with GP practices to ensure they were aware of how the Health Engagement service has adapted to support families during COVID 19.
- Promoted using outdoor activities to improve wellbeing and have fun with family.
- Arranged and delivered food parcels to parents who were struggling financially during this period.
- Regular catch-up skype meetings with our manager and team to maintain staff support and ensure we are all fine with the cases we have open and ask any questions we would like help with and for Manager to update us with the latest HBC and Gov. Covid advice/guidance, we find this is extremely important.
- Maintained contact and support with some teenagers via email or text.
- Kept some families open longer than usually would to allow time for them to try resources we suggested.
- Completed online training regarding physiological first aid to Covid.

3.4 Daycare at Warrington Road and Ditton

- 3.4.1 Ditton Early years Centre and Warrington road Bambini nurseries are local authority daycare, during lock down they continued to provide a service for keyworker children, vulnerable children and now a phase reopening for the wider community. Alongside nursery provision they provided activity packs for children stories read by the different members of staff, made welfare calls, through Facebook stories were read by the different members of staff to families and groups.

3.5 **Safeguarding and Children in Care**

Children In Need and Child Protection

- iCART – initially saw a reduction in the number of contacts/ referrals – this has increased week on week, with the numbers now returning to the amount previously received pre COVID-19. iCART have predominantly worked from home, some workers are working from home due to staff isolating/shielding. Other agencies remain working from home, police have remained present in the office on an ad hoc basis. Daily conference calls are held with all staff and agencies to ensure iCART are working effectively in line with policy and procedures and maintaining a multi-agency approach. iCART have experienced an influx of agency requests for information – this may evidence agencies are ensuring they are gathering relevant information to inform their work and to safeguard children and young people as they were not being seen as frequently by universal services.
- Tools for referral – in response to surge planning and to ensure the information being provided by agencies informs the decisions made, we have developed and launched the use of screening tools to be completed and submitted with Child in Need referrals/contacts or on open cases to evidence areas for support.
- Supervised contact for children in care – unfortunately during lockdown, contact stopped between children and their parents/carers in line with government guidance. We have constantly reviewed the position with regards to contact and have continued to moved forward in line with the developing guidance. We are currently undertaking contact outdoors with families, this remains reduced due to the availability of appropriate venues with outside facilities.
- Virtual Contact - throughout the pandemic children have continued to have contact via virtual means i.e. Facetime etc. This has proved to be positive for a number of children and young people, who have reported they feel more comfortable and it is less intrusive into their time. The majority of parents have been extremely understanding with the measures in place and some are also reporting it has been positive. Foster carers have supervised a number of the virtual contacts, these contacts provide a lot more detail for the parents with the foster carers talking about what the child has been doing, what they like to eat etc.
- PPE – throughout the pandemic we have ensured all staff have

appropriate access to PPE.

- Duty Workers - the majority of staff in the Child in Need Teams have been, and continue to work from home. We have ensured appropriate levels of staff have remained in the office to respond to Section 47's and Duty Visits. On a daily basis there is 1 Principal Manager; 2 Practice Leads; 4 Social Workers and 2 Community Support Workers present in the office. This enables an effective response to safeguarding concerns and ensure staff are safeguarded and appropriate social distancing is in place.
- "Bubbles" – as a result of the easing of the restrictions, working "Bubbles" have been introduced, this ensures the same staff work on a rota basis of staff being present in the office, that is, 1 week in the office 2/3 weeks at home. This is to ensure if a member of staff exhibits symptoms or is tested positive, that "Bubble" can then leave the office and work from home and would not have had any contact with people from the other 2/3 "Bubbles".
- Temporary Assessment Team – as a result of COVID-19 we have seen an increase in Social Work caseloads, it is also anticipated, when universal services return full time there will be a surge in referrals/contacts. We have been proactive in planning for the surge, we are in the process of appointing a temporary assessment team. The team will receive the referral from iCART and undertake the SAP, only cases that progress to a plan will be transferred to the CIN Teams. This will ensure a timely assessment is undertaken and will support staff and enable them the time to review their caseloads and progress plans and closures effectively and efficiently.
- COVID-19 Risk Assessment – from the beginning of lockdown, all cases were reviewed and a COVID-19 Risk Assessment undertaken on all cases. This assured us the frequency and mechanism of visiting the child had been considered with management oversight, with increased visiting agreed if required. All cases were RAG rated to ensure we considered the current risk due to the closure of universal services. The Risk Assessment is also reviewed regularly in line with changes in circumstances and the child's plan. We have continued to work closely and effectively with education to ensure vulnerable children continue to attend school.

3.6 **Children in Care and Care Leavers**

- 3.6.1 • On a weekly basis all Social Workers and Personal Advisors review all children and young people and appropriately RAG rate them dependent upon their need and send to the Divisional Manager.

- A vulnerable care leaver spreadsheet is updated based on the above RAG details and on a weekly basis and is sent to DCS, OD and EDT for information.
- All panels still running re Emotional health and wellbeing, Care leaver's accommodation group, placement panel etc.
- Re-instigated new residential to foster care project and cohort of children.
- All cases have a COVID statutory visits risks assessment on file which are subject to review
- The service has worked collaboratively to stabilise placements, with only three placements disruptions.
- We have ensured that those young people leaving care at 18 have been able to remain in their care placements whilst plans for move on accommodation is explored due to delays as a result of COVID19.
- PA's have continued to support young people to transition into their own accommodation when the need has arisen and we have commissioned floating support for a number of care leavers to ensure young people are supported at this difficult time.
- The Council's shared accommodation is now successfully furnished following its refurbishment. The four bedroomed facility will be subject to impending risk assessment for potential opening and commissioning the running of the service
- We have transitioned children on to their adoptive placements to prevent any drift in the child's life. Whilst this has been challenging and a balancing act in respect of ensuring the safety of the child, fostering household, adoptive household and our staff, four children have been placed in their adoptive placement since March 2020.
- Children and young people are beginning to have contact with their families outdoors, in the community for short amounts of time when safe to do so. Risk Assessments are being completed and discussions are held with foster carers/residential staff, SSW, child's SW and CSW to inform this Assessment to ensure that it is safe and appropriate for contact to take place. Foster carers and parents have been provided with guidance in respect how contact will be managed and with clear expectations for parents. So far, for those children and young people who have had face to face contact, this has gone well.
- CICC still meeting virtually on a fortnightly basis to discuss significant issues and service delivery. Some members of the children in care council have recently been involved in the recruitment of a PA's for the team.
- Over 200 DFE laptops have been delivered to CIC&CL.
- The service has successfully implemented a skeleton rota with a new 'bubble rota' operational for 4 weeks now to further limit the potential spreads of the virus and in response to creating an outbreak plan.

- PIMMS meeting still occurring weekly, PIMMS improving and I've got a virtual performance clinic booked in for early July
- All supervisions are up to date across service.
- DM continues to chair management meeting booked in fortnightly- including finance and budget overview.
- Service wide team meetings occur three weekly, in the interim POPD meetings continue to be held every morning between the PL and their staff.
- Weekly audits evidencing compliance and CIC continue to update COVID stat visits risk assessments based on changing needs of child and circumstances, which is resulting on more face to face visits.

3.7 **Fostering Service**

- 3.7.1
- Fostering Panel has run consistently since crisis started with only a 2 week delay on March panel to allow us to action 'virtual' arrangements. Between panels in March, April, May and June we have discussed and approved -6 new Mainstream households, 2 new Connected Person households, approved 4 Long Term matches with our CIC and carers and agreed 2 changes of approval for foster carers
 - July panel has – 1 Mainstream household, 2 connected people households and 1 LT match to be considered.
 - Fostering have also recruited to 2 FT vacancies during lockdown.
 - The service have completed 53 viability assessments with CIN colleagues and there are 16 joint fostering/SGO assessments either ongoing or completed.

3.8 **Inglefield**

- 3.8.1
- Inglefield short breaks unit had to be closed due to high level of vulnerability of children who access the service. However, we have completed a Risk registrar of all children who access the service, Risk assessment of staff and the building and we are planning to safely open for day care initially before moving to resuming overnight short breaks.
 - Staff have kept regular telephone/FaceTime/email contact as appropriate to each child and their family's needs, offering support, advice, signposting when appropriate and sometimes 'just to listen'. In addition to helping families with provisions and the collection/delivery food and essential supplies.
 - A post card with photos of all the staff team and some encouraging words was sent individually to all our young people which was well received.

3.9 **Placements Team**

- 3.9.1
- Overarching_Immediate processing and authorisation of all invoices to ensure earliest possible payments to aid cash flow – this will revert back to usual process as of 20th July in line with authority payment terms.
 - SEND OOB pupils - risk assessments completed for children in out of borough settings and maintained contact with schools having regular discussions about the status of children and how schools support children to come return.
 - Social Care placements – planned contractual monitoring visits are in the process of starting again , linked to a an agreed risk assessment – process has been reviewed.
 - Social Care placements – sub regional work across Liverpool City Region relating to a localised contractual framework has continued during lockdown – a full provider consultation exercise has been completed and tender goes out mid-July for Residential and Fostering placements in the external sector.
 - Placements North West - We have utilised the regularly updated data provided by Placements North West from the providers on the regional Flexible Purchasing System (framework).
 - A total of 542 Children’s Homes are provided with a daily opportunity to report on key measures relating to the impact and management of COVID-19 (most within the North West, some – included on our Flexible Purchasing System – may be within 20miles of region’s borders or more specialist ‘at a distance’ provision). 462 or 85% of homes have provided a full or partial response, of these - 10% are closed to new referrals (this may not be COVID-19 related) and 72% report there are no available placements.

3.10 **Educational Outcomes and effective practice for Children in Care and Care Leavers**

- 3.10.1
- Despite the challenges of different working conditions and environments good levels of communication between social care, schools and Virtual school have continued throughout this uncertain period.
 - Ensure that despite the current situation there is no drift for a number of children and young people where applications for an EHCP need to be made or they are undergoing statutory assessment. This has been facilitated by the PEP Coordinators and by our commissioned EP support.
 - Any educational or pastoral concerns have been raised with the Virtual School in a timely manner from either schools or social care so that any issues can be dealt with swiftly.
 - The Virtual School website has been enhanced and regularly

updated with covid-19 guidance from the DfE; curriculum links, particularly Maths and English and other subject support/resources to support learning at home; other activities to support carers in keeping children and young people engaged in their learning such as virtual tours of museums, cross curricular activities, coding projects, arts & craft ideas, fun ideas from famous authors etc. A new section with ideas and resources to support Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing has also been added. We are looking to develop a more interactive learning section so that children and young people can remain active in their learning at home in the future.

3.11 **Personal Education Plans**

- 3.11.1
- PEPs have successfully moved to a virtual format with all key professionals, and where appropriate children and young people, taking part in conference calls and so the PEPs have continued to be completed in a timely manner.
 - PEPs have provided a clear mechanism to address any concerns foster carers have had in supporting children and young people with their education at home and in reducing anxieties around children and young people returning to school.
 - PEPs have focused on identifying interventions to support transition of young people back into education settings and have allowed schools to plan ahead including providing any extra support required to facilitate reintegration. This has included virtual tours of school prior to a child or young person's return and arranging bespoke visits for our Y6 pupils who are moving to Secondary schools.
 - Pupil Premium Plus has continued to be available to schools to support the learning of children and young people and in particular has been used to maintain key mentor support for some children when in school.

3.11.2 **Encouraging and Maintaining School Attendance /Access to learning:-**

- The Virtual School has been proactive in encouraging all our children and young people in care to access school throughout this period in line with DfE guidance. The PEP Coordinators in particular have provided a bridge of communication and facilitation between schools, carers and social workers and they have coordinated bespoke planned returns to school. This is regardless of where the child is placed or being educated.
- Virtual School have been working with carers and schools to ensure that CIC have been able to access to online during COVID 19.
- Learning resources that had previously been identified for children and young people have continued to be provided – for example, Storytime magazine subscriptions have continued to be

sent out to children aged 5-9 who were identified as needing extra support with reading.

- The Virtual School was in the process of launching a digital learning platform (Anspear/Nimbl) which was being targeted at specific children and young people and their carers. This could not happen in the planned way so our Education Support Worker has been contacting each carer and young person individually to ensure that they're set up on the system and can access both curriculum materials for the child/young person and also education based professional development modules for the carers. Initial feedback from carers is that it's something they can use in addition to the school work being set and children are finding the interactive resources engaging.

3.12 **Safeguarding Unit**

- 3.12.1
- Initial and Review Child Protection Conferences have continued to be held within statutory timescales as have LAC/CiC reviews. The Local Authority did not take up the offer to relax timescales around the 6 month review for Children in Care as it was not felt to be in the best interests of our children.
 - All meetings have been virtual and there have been some positives as a result of this including greater participation by Fathers in Child Protection Conferences. Children have also been more likely to participate in their meetings, both CP Conferences and LAC reviews. We will use the lessons learned during covid 19 restrictions to create more flexible ways that key individuals within the family can contribute to children's meetings.
 - There has been an increase in child protection numbers. Some of this increase is due to child protection plans not progressing due to interventions to reduce risk not being as available and assessment not then not being able to evidence sustained, positive change. Ending plans too early will put children at greater risk of harm and will be evidenced by an increase in repeat child protection plans and children coming into care following a crisis incident in the home.
 - An agenda item for the July Safeguarding Practice Group is to discuss how we can progress planning for children and confidently end plans where risk has reduced.
 - IRMs have been scrutinising risk reduction planning for all children who have been reported missing and are subject of a Child Protection Plan or are Looked After to ensure that plans are robust and that the Pan Cheshire protocol is being followed.
 - An additional IRM post has been agreed to help manage the significant increase/volume of activity in the Safeguarding Unit and ensure that we can continue to meet statutory timescales.

This post was filled on 06/07/20 and will help reduce pressure on the team so that we can begin to progress our service development plans.

- Our service development priorities are to improve the quality of child protection plans and to increase the effectiveness of the IRMs in effectively challenging delay in both child protection planning and for Children in Care. We have developed an escalation process to support with this and this will be rolled out on 07/07/20.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 None identified.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 None identified.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

Continuing to provide support and services for children and families during the lockdown is fundamental to the Council's commitment to support the most vulnerable families in the Borough.

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

None identified.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Children and young people whose health needs and level of development is potentially compromised are supported during COVID 19 and statutory duties are met.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

Children who are at risk of harm are identified quickly and services work together to minimise the risk of harm and take action to formally protect children in a timely way.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None identified.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 All services have in place to mitigate the impact of COVID 19.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 Issues arising from a child's equality and diversity needs will inform the decision-making at the point of contact and it will be ensured that the voice of the child is to the forefront.

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

9.1 There are no relevant background documents to this report.

Team Around The Family



Our Service
Response during
COVID19



July 2020



TEAM AROUND THE FAMILY

Introduction

Since March 2020 the world has been a very different place however here in halton the team around the family service have adapted creative ways of providing services to our halton families

Here are some examples of ways we have engaged successfully with children young people and families during these very difficult times!

Early Intervention iCART

- Constant e-mail updates with regards to service changes – can we move to having a website / portal with up-to-date service information?
- More frequent meetings resulting in less time to do the job
- Higher staff sickness due to circumstances resulting in increased pressures upon other team members
- More flexible and modern working practices e.g. working from home, remote meetings
- Training and support to professionals via Skype / online
- More focused team meetings
- Clearer definition of job role – playing on people’s strengths
- Additional support from Attendance & Behaviour service in terms of providing education information to support iCART screening process
- Swifter referrals to Children’s Centres for rapid response with regards to food and finance issues
- Gathering the child’s voice more directly over the telephone
- Referring to services who have continued to support children and families via different methods
- Feedback from discretionary payment follow-up very positive
- Families have been grateful for honesty around support still being offered but in a different way

Locality Teams

Creative ways of working differently within the COVID restrictions

- Direct work sessions in local parks/wellbeing walks
- Video calls with children to obtain wishes and feelings/complete CAF pack/direct work
- Video calls with parents to complete parenting work, observe home conditions and complete CAF pack
- CAF’s held virtually; especially useful for parents with mental health issues as they feel more comfortable and may not feel able to attend in person under usual circumstances

TEAM AROUND THE FAMILY

- Emailing resources, including links to useful websites to provide both educational resources and fun activities - Direct work completed via online platforms
- Encouraging families to explore the outdoors in a safe and fun way, in line with government guidelines
- Advice and guidance to support parents in managing the children at home in a positive environment
- Increased resourcefulness and encouraged creative thinking regarding engagement
- Offering emotional support on the phone and then been sending out the nurture resources to use at home and talk through with staff to implement measures
- Support parents and young people to access support for their mental health during lockdown including Voice recordings made of relaxation exercises and stress busters sent via WhatsApp
- Provided practical support for parents struggling financially through foodbanks and community shop and connecting them with local organisations providing food and other essentials and benefit issues
- Providing physical resources for those who struggle to access online activities.
- Staff have been out for walks with young people and parents with young children which enables them to talk more freely without worrying about neighbours overhearing.
- Provide information on how to stay safe, how to occupy their family, how to establish routines and deal with conflict
- Coordinate Multi Agency working remotely to ensure that plans of support are put in place and reviewed
- Social distanced meetings held on school premises use of desks to appropriately position attendees
- Support those with young families balancing lockdown life alongside the job and home schooling – particularly those of other key workers
- Some agencies (specifically CAMHS and young carers) are triaging and responding to referrals in a more efficient way
- Use of rag rating as regular team meeting agenda item enables the whole team to better understand individual worker & team pressures (amber/red cases) whilst can also offer opportunity to share good practice and service impact as cases progress from amber to green.

Comments from Families

- ‘So grateful for your support which pulled me through – couldn’t have done it without you! ‘
- ‘Thanks, you’re the only person who has helped me to get emergency support for our relative who was struggling with their mental health
- ‘Thanks for all your support for my child to go back in to school, I couldn’t have done it without you’
- ‘Knowing that we have your support makes a real difference I couldn’t thank you enough for your help.’
- ‘Thank you so much you have helped me so much in the last few days’
- ‘Thank god you’re still here’
- ‘Made up you’re all still out there for us, couldn’t have coped with this without you’

TEAM AROUND THE FAMILY

- ‘Knowing you’re on the end of the phone at any time is helping my mental health’
- ‘I couldn’t have done this without you – you saved my sanity’
- ‘thank you for all your help last week, I couldn’t even think straight with everything going on – feel loads better I have had a bit of time to myself today, I needed it so thank you...’
- ‘Thank you so much. Overwhelmed with the help and support I am receiving from yourself and school. We cannot thank you enough.’
- ‘Please tell JB thanks and it was lovely to see and talk to her and I am so grateful to you both’
- ‘Thank u, I didn’t expect u to do this thought u might know a service I could use, but u are amazing, thanks so much.’
- ‘The lengthy conversations I have had had with you during COVID have really helped me gain insight around what my daughters witness in relation to my relationship with my husband’.
- ‘Thanks for your email and your kind words as well that meant a lot to read that and you’ve definitely made me feel better with your words and your offer of help as well I really do need it at the minute.
- ‘whilst speaking to you before about boundaries the penny dropped about the way that K[12yrs] has become the adult in the house, he was asking if friends could come in the house and I said no, he kicked off and put a hole in my living room door, so I did what you said and called 101, he broke down and started to cry and said he was sorry whilst I was on the phone’

Halton Children Centre’s (CC)

Early help and support

- Phone call support, families really benefitted from this as they reported feeling isolated. Increased the phone contact for single parent families in response to this. Families responded well to this and were very open to providing information about their issues & concerns.
- CAF/CiN meetings virtually
- One to One nurture via video/phone calls
- Play and positive interaction ideas and resources delivered to families
- Door step visits to families.
- Welcomm screenings completed via telephone calls/video calls where possible
- Supplied and delivered emergency food supplies.
- Play partners telephone support – this has been challenging as it would normally be delivered in the home and is about modelling good interactions. See more detailed report below on how we have developed it to be done virtually.
- HELPs service continuing and amended to fit in with covid regulations (see in detail below)
- Themed play bags to support child development and positive interactions – these have been planned in line with children’s development and delivered to families homes.

TEAM AROUND THE FAMILY

- Easter Egg donations delivered to families
- Social media posts to signpost families, interact with them and keep families engaged.
 - Online celebration of Book Trusts Pyjamarama
 - Staff 'Keeping in touch' video
 - Online Nursery Rhyme Competition
 - Sunflower competition supported by local garden centre
- Facilitating CSC contacts
- Support with equipment - FNP
- Support Asylum Families
- Staff Training via E Learning

Halton HELPS (Home Safety Equipment):

- Free provision of equipment for vulnerable families
- Home safety checks by professionals done via telephone
- Range of home safety reminder posts on CC and HELPS Facebook pages – this was important as accidents in the home increased due to lockdown

Service user comments

- The HELPS equipment has helped to make two children safer in their home, Mum was very thankful for the equipment and says that having the stair gates allows her to feel more confident that baby is safe while carrying out necessary tasks in the kitchen.
- We obtained x 2 safety gates for a child removed from his mother's care under an interim order and placed with relatives, this assisted the family by them not incurring any additional expense
- Feedback from the family I referred was great. The mum in particular was amazed that she could access the safety items, as these were items that she could not afford – it also enabled me to have a discussion with her about home safety for her young children, which was instigated by the equipment your service offered. It has helped me build a relationship with her as she has seen the services that are available to her in the community, and I think she trusts the service and may take up some courses if / when they come up.
- Family are renovating their home during the covid-19 lockdown. The stairs are unsafe and mum is worried that the child will be hurt if she manages to access the hallway. The stair gates that free HELPS has provided for them will provide extra security so that the child cannot access the hallway so easily. Her risk of harm has now been reduced which will have a massive positive impact on the family during this time
- I referred a client who, when I did the assessment form with her, was in labour with her sixth child. My client also has a one year old, so safety gates were really needed, as well as harness reins. My client was so grateful at the prompt delivery of them all, once she was home from hospital.

TEAM AROUND THE FAMILY

- I think from my perspective it has been great because we work with vulnerable families who probably would not have had the money to buy their own. Thank you for doing such a good job!
- I referred one of my CP families for safety equipment as they required stairgates and a fire guard. One of the children enjoys climbing and had cut her head after falling on to the fire place. Mum was extremely grateful for the equipment and told me she feels more relaxed now with the children as they are at less risk of hurting themselves.
- I referred a family who have recently moved to the area days before to lockdown and who are on CIN. The day before I delivered the gate, the fire service had attended and questioned her about safety gates. She was able to assure them it was in hand and the gates would be with her within the next 24 hours. For me it demonstrates how safety was at the forefront for all agencies in this example.

Widnes Children Centre

Reviewed Play Partners for Covid 19

During the Covid19 outbreak the children centre play team wanted to be able to still reach parents that were requiring Play Partners. It was felt that it would be quite difficult to ask the parent to complete the activity whilst on the phone and keep the child/children engaged.

So we worked to come up with a new way of working

New format:

Initial telephone call – To introduce ourselves to the family. We would also explain here that Play Partners is going to be delivered over the phone due to the current situation and we would talk the parents through how this would work. Also complete the 'All about us' forms.

Week one – Talk parent through activity and info sheet, Play partners guidelines

Week two – Evaluate week 1 activity, discuss info sheet on the importance of Play and next activity.

Week 3 – Evaluate week 2 activity, discuss info sheet on Communication and Language in play and next week's activity.

Week 4 – Evaluate week 3, discuss info sheet developing fine motor skills and next week's activity.

Week 5 – Evaluate week 4, discuss info sheet Reading with your child.

Week 6 – Overall evaluation. Discuss with the parent how they think the sessions have gone and if they feel that they have been beneficial. Any likes, dislikes etc.

The information each week can be tailored to the activity. For example if the parents would like an activity for encouraging Physical development then we can include information on the importance of physical play.

Voice of the Child

As we cannot physically see the child we have asked parents to take some photos during the activity and email them to us along with some comments for e.g. Sammy really enjoyed playing with the dough and he made lots of different shapes, he said his favourite was the fish.

TEAM AROUND THE FAMILY

At the end of the 6 weeks we will put the photos and comments together along with links to the Early Learning Goals and produce a certificate/collage of the families.

Feedback

We currently have a number of our Play team doing play partners in this way. We don't have any final evaluations as the full 6 weeks haven't yet been completed but feedback from some parents so far has been positive.

- One mum is an Asylum seeker from Africa who moved here just before the lockdown. She has a 6 month old baby and has very little support as she doesn't know anybody. The play worker working with this mum has said that they have built up a very good relationship and mum is really engaging sending photos and videos of them doing the activity. There is a bit of a language barrier and the mum doesn't have access to email so the play worker has been able to get the info printed off and delivered to them. This has helped as they can read over it at their own time.
- Another mum with 5 children at home all under 6yrs was struggling to find activities for them to do together. She has been able to feed back what the children have enjoyed and not enjoyed and the Play Worker has been able to help her adjust the activities to the needs and ages of the children.

Comments from Families

- "I feel like everything slowly falling into place after so long. Thank you so much for the help and support you've given me, you've been my hero through this and I really can't thank you enough."
- The washing machine has come, its helped me so much, thank you so much" "thank you so much. I am so excited. No more washing the clothes in the bath now"
- "Thank you so much Julie. I really appreciate all the help through this difficult time"
- The family I'm currently working with is a single parent and her child is in the process of being assessed by Woodveiw for possible ADHD, she is also a carer for her mum who has a lot of health issues. Lockdown had taken its toll and she was struggling to manage her child's behaviour, coupled with not having the usual regular break nursery would give her and in complete despair she went into the closest clinic and had a panic attack. I was allocated the family and quickly we arranged the first CAF meeting which was 2 days ago. At the end of the meeting the mum said she felt like a weight had been lifted, as she thought no support was available due to Lockdown and she couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel.
- The children's centre have been fantastic, I didn't know where to turn so I went to the council for help. I got a call and everything was sorted, I know who to call now if I need advice, just fantastic, thank you so much!

TEAM AROUND THE FAMILY



Disabled Children's Service (DCS)

Halton's Disabled Children Service works across the Borough providing Short Breaks Services to families of disabled children. We commission a range of short breaks services, complete assessments, coordinate and review support packages and conduct parent carer needs assessments.

Since lockdown, the majority of our Short Breaks services have been suspended but our Providers have and our service have worked creatively to provide a service;

- Maintained weekly contact with families to provide advice and reassurance.
- We have developed a hub and spoke model where all of the families have had weekly contact via phone, text, email, Skype and Zoom from at least one agency
- DCS staff have provided advice and support on access to food, medication, behaviour management and activities etc.
- DCS have worked with the agencies to explore creative ways of alternative support including online activities and the purchase of toys and activities.
- Families who have access to support via a Personal Budget have been able to maintain a service if their Personal Assistant is available for work but if not we have supported them to use some funds in alternative ways as a temporary measure.
- We are currently working with Commissioners and commissioned services to establish a plan to phase in the return of services following appropriate risk assessments and discussions with families. During the next 3 months, whilst we anticipate that there will be more face to face delivery, this is still going to be significantly less than would usually be provided in the summer period. Providers are also planning how they might further extend their services in the autumn until Christmas. Further information will be provided on Halton's Local Offer website <https://localoffer.haltonchildrenstrust.co.uk/leisure/>

Comments from Families

Feedback from parents whose son Kyle receives support from Halton's Disabled Children Service, Education and Inglefield.

- Education: "They did an amazing job finding and allocating my son a new better school. Despite being thrown into panic by Kyle's previous school expelling him just before lockdown and I can only respect them for their hard work and time taken. My son is a lot happier in his new school and it's thanks to the hard work of not just one but all of the special educational needs team in Halton."

TEAM AROUND THE FAMILY

- Inglefield: Closed doors due to coronavirus epidemic but have kept in regular contact via phone and email. "I'm extremely grateful for the care and consideration they show not just to Kyle but my whole family. And yes even for the hugely helpful tips and links sent via email.
- Social worker/Early Help Worker: "A lot of this departments work is normally done via home visits, meetings and phone coronavirus changed all of that. I have kept in regular contact via email and phone. I know have a greater respect for not just Anita but all social workers. It's not an easy job and to have your normal ways of working changed completely is tough for anyone to handle. Having people like this to talk to and ask for help has made a huge difference. It is from the heart when I say social workers in general are overworked and deserve a pay raise. A lot of people underappreciate the work they do. My family hold great respect for Anita and the whole team of social workers. And would like to thank them for all there help and consideration during these tough times for everyone.' (Mr and Mrs Roundtree June 2020)



Information from Lesley Merriman, Community Support Worker, Disabled Children Service:

- We have been able to support families to use their budget in a different way to give the young people access to more social and leisure activities that they use within the home or garden.
- Agencies have continued to support some of our most vulnerable young people. They have created "work bubbles" minimising the staff on Rota to restrict how many people go to the house.
- Places that have had to close to the public have offered there services to families i.e. CAFT
- Due to the volunteer sector we have been able to signpost our families to i.e. food and medical deliveries, personal support i.e. mental health support - someone to talk to.
- Although taking government advice and working from home we have been able to support our families who have anxiety, stress and mental health issues by garden gate visits to give them the 1 -1 adult company that gives them some reassurance that they are not alone.

TEAM AROUND THE FAMILY

Parents comments

- You are a star, Thank you, he is a very happy boy.'
- 'Thank you for enabling me to provide much needed sensory equipment for Genevieve and Alicia during lockdown, it has been an amazing help along with all the support yourself (Anita) and Jade have provided. I've felt so comfortable calling or texting either of you for support or advice- we couldn't have done it without you. I appreciate everything you all do for us and being there for me x'
- Hi Pam I would just like to say a huge thank you for the funding it's helped me and the girls keep busy making masks for our community. One of the biggest orders was for Halton Haven Hospice who needed 50 masks and 25 headbands. We had a call off them last week asking could they have another 50 so they have 2 each. Thank-you for the weekly phone calls as well it's kept me sane ha-ha.' (Leanne Hornby – June 2020)



TEAM AROUND THE FAMILY

- Pre-CAF's completed via phone contact, found that parents were able to use this time to really discuss their child at length, this also helped them to give thought to the impact on them and their family as a whole
- Provided relevant advice and practical resources for families and young people. Emailing resources and useful links to appropriate websites to address the issues raised in referral from GP
- Advice and guidance offered over the phone to support parents and family through the corona lockdown enabling them to cope a little better at home
- Offering emotional support over the phone using listening skills to enable appropriate response to their situation and provide containment to families during this difficult time
- Regular contact with families to offer support and families also encouraged to contact Health Engagement Officer if they felt they needed support via phone, text, email ensuring communication was effective and appropriate for the family and their needs
- Liaising with other support agencies to ensure consistency for the family such as: CAMHS/Woodveiw/Chatterbug/Disability/school head teachers/ GP's and surgery support staff, this enable's linked up working and provides a better support system for the young person and family
- Developed a range of resources, books, useful websites and information on a variety of key themes to support children, young people and their families including self-help information. These resources were also shared with colleagues within Halton Borough Council to benefit a wider catchment of families to ensure information was disseminated and families have access to information and advice online.
- Sent out resource worksheets covering many different issues to help them with behaviour/emotions/routines/boundaries etc. which could be accessed at home by families during lockdown
- Liaising with GP practices to ensure they were aware of how the Health Engagement service has adapted to support families during COVID 19.
- Promoted using outdoor activities to improve wellbeing and have fun with family
- Arranged and delivered food parcels to parents who were struggling financially during this period
- Regular catch-up skype meetings with our manager and team to maintain staff support and ensure we are all fine with the cases we have open and ask any questions we would like help with and for Manager to update us with the latest HBC and Gov. Covid advice/guidance, we find this is extremely important
- Maintained contact and support with some teenagers via email or text.
- Kept some families open longer than usually would to allow time for them to try resources we suggested.
- Completed online training regarding physiological first aid to Covid.

Feedback from Parents

- "The information and worksheets have worked with H and it has also made me look at things in a different way, which I would not of done without the information and work sheets , I am happy about this".
- Mum informed that they had been working with their daughter using the work sheets and said these have been really helpful and their daughter was now even telling them when she needed to do some more work with the resources.

TEAM AROUND THE FAMILY

- “Thanks Carla, we’re trying the Hidden Chimp book and C is really enjoying it. I’m just worried about her starting school in September but for now she is doing well”
- “It was really helpful speaking to you earlier, I just feel so helpless because I can’t fix everything for R, and you’ve given me some hope that there is actually light at the end of the tunnel!”
- “Thank you for calling and speaking to A, I’ll keep encouraging her to do what you’ve suggested, thanks”
- ‘Thanks for helping, I always seek help and anything I can do best for the kids I always have. Thanks for understanding and being helpful, you’re a star.’
- ‘Many thanks for the emails, I am sure we will find some useful information and ideas to help.’
- ‘Hi Laura, everything is fine, K has improved a lot I’ve had no concerns and she hasn’t done any of the things since. All the information helped a lot. Thank you.’

Daycare at Warrington Road and Ditton

Ditton Early years Centre and Warrington road Bambini nurseries are local authority day care, we provide a safe, happy, caring, secure and stimulating environment for children. To enable all children to develop their capabilities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society, during lock down we have continued to provide a service for keyworker children, vulnerable children and now a phase reopening for the wider community.

Warrington Road Daycare

Below are some of the responses we have had off parents from communications through email from the Managers and responses to parent questionnaires that were sent out, in which the parents were asked about how they felt about the activity packs and things on Facebook that have been provided during the pandemic and the keeping in touch calls that have taken place during this time.

- Kids loved being back in nursery yesterday (HR, RR-baby, pre-school)
- thank you so much for fitting him in he can't wait to come back and see the girls (MA-preschool)
- More stories read by the different members of staff, on Facebook, was made up to hear Claire’s voice the other day reading a book. ☺ (E.C-pre-school)
- Thanks for keeping in touch and checking on our family’s welfare. (RH-pre-school)
- It is nice to know that we aren’t alone. It makes me more at ease when I am in work knowing that my daughter is safe and with people who do anything to keep her smiling. (GW-toddler)
- The pack we collected has been good for him. She really likes completing the activities. (CL-toddler)
- More activity packs, she has really got stuck into these when we have picked them up. It’s as if she is receiving a gift! She gets really excited about them and these have provided much needed stimulation for her. (SB-pre-school)

TEAM AROUND THE FAMILY

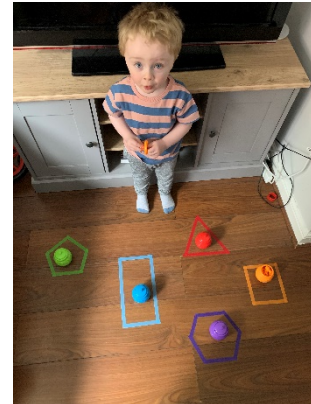
- I think it's been really nice that you have stayed in touch and have gone to the trouble of making the activity packs instead of just saying, well we're on Lockdown so that's that. It shows that all of the children's needs have not been forgotten about so thank you very much for this
- Thank you for remaining open and caring for her as a keyworker child. We understand this is an unusual time and she misses her friends and teachers at Nursery. We hope you and all your families are well. Thank you once again. (FA-toddler)
- it has been lovely to hear from you and we were very touched when you called to sing happy birthday to him, We are trying to talk about nursery to him to keep you in his mind to make the transition back a bit easier, but if he could perhaps talk to come of the girls a bit more then it may help him to remember more. (BM-baby/toddler)
- The story reading on Facebook has been a big hit. He loves hearing your voices. The activities that you have been putting together have been really good and we've enjoyed doing those. Thank you for continuing to while he has been at home, he can't wait to come back and see his friends. (LM-toddler)
- It's been really nice to receive the calls. It makes us feel that you really care and that my daughter is an important part of your nursery family. It's also nice to speak to another person outside of the house! (LM-toddler)
- Thank you so much for the email. The phone call has helped me to understand more about ways to talk to my daughter etc. Please can I have them printed out as I can only see half of the pages on my phone?
- Thank you again for being so understanding (GW-toddler)

Ditton Early Years Daycare

- Engaged our children in learning opportunities to support them and emotional well-being.
- provided a safe, happy caring, stimulating and secure environment for our children where everyone feels valued, included and respected
- To create a nursery, which feels like home, and to ensure entrance and exit the settings is safe for our staff, children and parents.
- To work in partnership with other agencies and our communities to promote the welfare of our children
- To have confident, happy, independent learners who enjoy coming to nursery, and to promote well- being and respect
- To develop a culture of ambition and achievement
- To equip our children with skills for learning, life and work, ready to actively grasp and follow their dreams in the future
- To make provision for children with special educational needs in accordance with the SEND code of practice
- To have weekly contact with are venerable families who aren't attending
- To have two weekly phone calls to all parents to keep up dated on their learning and support to families if it's needed, through proving work, strategies' or just a conversation of reassurance.

TEAM AROUND THE FAMILY

- Provide a welcoming service to families whose nursery has closed but still require care, opening as a hub.



DRAFT

REPORT TO:	Children, Young People & Families Policy & Performance Board
DATE:	20 th July 2020
REPORTING OFFICER:	Strategic Director, People
PORTFOLIO:	Children, Education & Social Care
SUBJECT:	Education, Inclusion & Provision Update
WARD(S)	All

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 This report provides a summary of the work of the Education, Inclusion and Provision Department during COVID 19.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION: That:**

i) **Members note the contents of the report.**

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 **Background**

Although most staff have been working from home, throughout the lockdown the Officers in the Education, Inclusion and Provision Department have continued to provide key services. This informal report summarises some of the key activities that have taken place since 23rd March 2020.

3.2 **Early Years and School Improvement Update**

3.2.1 **Early Years**

- Collecting the attendance details of EY's children attending pre-schools; nurseries; childminders and out of school clubs. This includes breaking down and reporting attendance of vulnerable groups such as Children in Care (CIC); Children in Need (CIN); children with a child protection plan (CP) and other vulnerabilities such as those with an Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP).
- Reporting to DFE changes and trends in attendance on a daily basis.
- Regular telephone conferences with RSC/DFE officer to outline the key issues and barriers to the sector including financial implications; sustainability; sufficiency; Out of School Club issues

and matters that we can raise to feedback to government

- Initially ensuring we had enough childcare provision; securing provision and brokering settings to remain open and act as hubs so that we could meet sufficiency requirements
- Advising about risk assessments for re-opening for all children; for risk assessments for vulnerable and following up provisions making arrangements for children with EHCP's to support and meet their needs
- Advising and providing guidance about frequent and regular changes in government guidance and public health guidance to ensure provisions are aware of latest statutory requirements and guidelines
- Weekly phone calls with an EY Communication group sharing effective practice; key issues; national and local plans; feeding back to DFE about sector issues
- Updating Family Information Service with information and provision available which requires regular updating
- Liaise with DFE regarding the EY Outcomes Fund programme "TALK Halton" and EY Professional Development Fund which is currently on from DFE pause but due to continue next year.

3.3 **School Improvement & Governance**

- 3.3.1
- Leading on the creation and coordination of extensive documents to support around schools re-opening; planning; assessment changes and recording; practical planning for physical school environment; meeting children's social, emotional and well-being needs; PHSE and bereavement guidance; transport to school; communication pathways; signposts to advice.
 - Identifying and sharing sources and resources for home learning and links to websites for home/remote learning prior to the government establishing The Oak Academy online resource.
 - Creating and sharing Transition documents to support transition processes during a Covid outbreak response.
 - Support to schools around NQT assessment, support and completion of induction year arrangements, whilst planning a suite of NQT handbook and training documents for next academic year.
 - Ahead of Covid a new governor services provider had been brokered so time has been spent frequently liaising and sharing contacts with schools and the new service provider ; supporting governor queries; providing guidance and advice to governors;

checking governor compliance for schools and continuing to recruit LA governors.

- Directors briefing for governors and planning for a virtual briefing termly detailed report.
- Supporting Headteacher recruitment arrangements and re-organising for next academic year for those going through recruitment. Brokering interim arrangements.
- Liaising with EEF about Halton's EEF Maths project which is working across the primary and secondary sector.
- Liaising weekly with Primary; secondary and special schools and the college about educational issues; Covid plans and impact and national/local issues to share with DFE/RSC.
- Continuing to hold Schools Causing Concern meetings for schools that fall into this category-ongoing challenge, support and monitoring.
- Creating, establishment and holding regular 3 hour IEB meetings to support a school in special measures. A wealth of challenge and support work to secure a rapid improvement journey for the school.
- Support and advice to schools covering a range of school concerns and planning. Schools are requiring a great deal of advice and reassurance throughout this period.
- Advising and informing schools of changes to assessment processes and plans moving into next year.
- Planning of school improvement core offer for next academic year.
- Detailed reports produced of school performance data with relevant benchmarking; census data and performance of SEND children EHCP and children on support plans; data analysis reports produced for Children in Care; detailed reports and analysis of a range of attendance data.
- School Games Organised has tweeted and created daily physical challenges for children, families and schools, whilst organising virtual competitions and physical challenges.
- Liaising virtually with Reading Strategy group to continue plans for Halton Reading Strategy.
- Ongoing liaison with regional partners to share planning and effective practice locally and regionally.
- TALK Halton team have been creating a wealth of communication training materials to support communication and language development including postcards for parents sharing

communication ideas in the home and whilst out at the park/shops etc. they have also produced a detailed evaluation report sharing impact so far and future planning.

- Some key successes include being able to maintain provision for vulnerable children and keyworker children throughout in both EY's, schools and Riverside College; ensuring that Halton were able to deliver on the statutory duty to provide sufficient childcare for the region and advise parents/carers of provision available. Our rates of vulnerable EY's children attending provision is increasing week on week and has always been above national rates.

3.4 **Behaviour Support Service**

- 3.4.1
- The LA's has been proactive in its support around managing trauma, behaviour and mental health issues in readiness for (vulnerable) children's return to school. Summarised is the key activities undertaken in this area by the Behaviour Support Service.
 - Kept in touch with 150 previously trained school Mental Health First Aider, including providing them with bespoke advice on how to support CYP both during and in preparation for post COVID19.
 - Regularly reviewed all guidance on behaviour management, physical handling and Mental Health First Aid to ensure that it is in line with the advice offered by DfE, PHE and national providers, both during COVID 19 and post COVID 19. This has also included updating the model Behaviour Policy provided to schools to that it includes all the required amendments and ensuring that the PHSE curriculum takes into account the impact of COVID 19 ready for September. Advice also been gained from Tom Bennett, Government's behaviour Tsar and from other LAs to ensure the most effective practice is in place in Halton. All of this has been communicated this to schools via the LA Daily briefing.
 - Developed resources for school staff to support them in identifying the signs that a child is experiencing anxiety, reminding them that behaviour is a communication of need, and providing strategies to manage this. These have been sent to all schools.
 - Provided a signposting service for HTs and other agencies, professionals and the community to relevant information from other reputable sources so that support can be provided to both pupils and adults on how to adapt to the 'new normal', including trauma based curriculum resources, emotional and mental health wellbeing resources for children and adults. All of this is regularly updated and is on the BSS section of the Local Offer.

- Recognising capacity issues for HTs, supported them by providing summaries of relevant documents for example the Education Endowment Fund's guidance report *Improving Social & Emotional Learning in Primary Schools*;
- Family Liaison Officers have continued to provide direct support to parents the Behaviour Support Service have previously worked with and also the new cases that have been referred by schools. Any additional support required has been coordinated by BSS, this has included acting as a conduit with school and parent, and facilitating a safe and planned return to school for the child.
- Provided bespoke advice and support to members of school staff and senior leaders in planning for the effective return of individual children who have previously displayed challenging behaviour. This has included input into risk assessments, guidance around the law regarding school behaviour policies and supporting the schools to reflect on and prioritise the needs of the child as well as reducing staff anxieties.
- With wider school opening we have resumed supporting our schools involved in a project with Pivotal Education to ensure that they are enabled to continue and enhance this work post-COVID and that this has a positive impact on behaviour in school.

3.5 Halton Virtual Schools

3.5.1 The Virtual School has continued to support our children and young people and the work it has undertaken is summarised below.

- Developed a PEP that takes into account the impact of COVID19 on the emotional health and mental wellbeing, and educational outcomes of children in care. The PEP meetings have been taking place using virtual platforms but are still in line with statutory guidance.
- Reviewed the attendance of each child in care, regardless of where they are educated and coordinated plans for their safe return to school if they are not attending.
- Provided bespoke support for any child who is experiencing anxiety or presenting with challenging behaviour to ensure that they can remain accessing their school. This has often meant coordinating individualised programmes.
- Provided a large number of online resources, via the Virtual School website, to support children and carers with learning at home. This has included emotional and mental health resources

as well as curriculum and transition support.

- Developed 'Keeping in Touch' age related packs which will go out to all children and young people in care to support them with learning during the summer and also prepare them for a return to a 'new normal' school in September.
- Continued to provide additional tuition through online services as required.
- Kept in touch with all Designated Teachers to ensure that they are up to date with any issues and also to provide support as they prepare for children in care returning to school.

3.6 Placement

- 3.6.1
- An overarching priority for the Placements team has been the immediate processing and authorisation of all invoices to ensure earliest possible payments to aid cashflow – this will revert back to usual process as of 20th July 2020 in line with authority payment terms.
 - Some of the sub regional and regional meetings that have traditionally been face to face meetings are able to be conducted via Skype / Zoom / Teams - this will reduce travel time as well as carbon footprint and some financials linked to mileage /parking
 - **SEND** – Regional framework that was being developed prior to lockdown has continued and tender will be launched imminently for day , 38 week and 52 week Educational placements
 - **SEND OOB pupils** - risk assessments completed for children in out of borough settings and maintained contact with schools having regular discussions about the status of children and how schools support children to come return.
 - **SEND OOB pupils** – weekly contact collated including attendance and any issues raised – fed on appropriately to the key person as well as SEN
 - **SEND OOB schools** - planned contractual monitoring visits are in the process of starting again , linked to a an agreed risk assessment – process has been reviewed
 - **SEND OOB Schools** - aside from the quality monitoring visits all other functions of the team have continued remotely
 - **Short breaks** – innovative delivery of services – on line / zoom / skype as well as direct delivery for some of the most complex young people throughout lockdown

- **Short breaks** – positive feedback from families accessing the services offered – feeling very supported
- **Short breaks** – building a Summer school holiday offer – risk assessed and direct contact with families to gauge what engagement would potentially look like
- **Short breaks** – providers using a you said we did in terms of how the service offer has changed during COVID
- **Social Care placements** – planned contractual monitoring visits are in the process of starting again, linked to an agreed risk assessment – process has been reviewed
- **Social Care placements** – sub regional work across Liverpool City Region relating to a localised contractual framework has continued during lockdown – a full provider consultation exercise has been completed and tender goes out mid July for Residential and Fostering placements in the external sector
- **Social care placements** – aside from the quality monitoring visits all other functions of the team have continued remotely.

3.7 Policy, Provision and Performance

- 3.7.1
- Officers have continued to deliver their statutory functions across a range of areas, and have adapted their ways of working to the current environment. In some cases existing statutory regulations have been temporarily amended by Parliament to ensure continuity of service, and officers have interpreted and adopted those regulations across service areas.
 - **Admissions:** the annual allocation of places to children in reception class at primary schools for September 2020 took place as usual on 16th April 2020. Officers continued to support parents and schools throughout this process and parents were notified of the outcome of their child's allocation without any disruption to the service.
 - Temporary Regulations were introduced to allow School Admission Appeals to continue throughout this time. LAs were given discretion to determine a process that would work for their demographic. School Admission Appeals are normally held with the panel, parents, school/LA representative, and clerk all present in the same room, but this has not been allowed during lockdown. Instead, all parties have been given the paperwork in advance, and been given time to email questions, queries on the appeal cases presented, following which panels have met virtually, with the clerk, and made their decisions. This process, to-date, has worked well.

- In Year Fair Access Panel meetings have been undertaken remotely with LA officers and school staff, ensuring that those children who are without a school place (pupils moving into the area, excluded, or where all parties feel that a move will be beneficial for the pupil) are continued to be offered provision and provided with the appropriate support.
- **Education Welfare Service:** The Education Welfare Service has continued to support schools and the borough's vulnerable families.
- Schools have received support with attendance matters, and Education Welfare Officers have collated attendance data from all Halton schools on a daily basis throughout the lockdown period to complete a return on the number of "vulnerable children and children of key/critical workers" attending all our schools each day.
- Vulnerable families have received a range of support from the provision of food vouchers, joint meetings with Children's Social Care Staff to family homes, and telephone support.
- Fixed penalty fines were ceased during this time for previous non-attendance as it was determined that those families were already likely to be suffering financial hardship due to work ceasing, parents being furloughed etc.
- Officers have continued to liaise and visit those families whose children are Electively Home Educated (those children and young people whose parents had removed them from education prior to COVID-19). Any home visit undertaken was risk assessed prior to visit, with officers equipped appropriately, and all social distancing and Health & Safety applied.
- Home Tuition review meetings have continued, being held remotely, for those pupils who, prior to COVID-19, were deemed medically unfit to attend school and were accessing tuition via attendance at the Home Tuition Centre in Ditton.
- **Technical Support:** have continued to visit schools and undertake electrical testing on portable appliances, and undertaken routine maintenance work on kitchen appliances.
- They have also provided a range of support to Head Teachers, caretakers, site managers, and school cleaning staff on increased cleaning routines throughout schools at this time across the borough nursery, primary, secondary and special schools.
- **Capital Development:** Whilst, generally, capital works at schools have temporarily ceased, this has allowed time for more in-depth discussions with schools about planned programmes of work in the future.

- Several capital programmes have continued due to the nature of the works, and others will commence again shortly. None of the cessation of works has or will impact upon curriculum delivery.
- **14-19 Team:** Members of the 14-19 Team have continued to liaise with children and young people who are at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Employment, Education, or Training), and it is widely acknowledged both locally and nationally that the current COVID-19 situation will have a significant impact in the future for the number of young people at risk of becoming NEET.
- Officers have been targeting support where needed, and scoping out plans to support those year groups who will be affected in the future. Officers have also continued to work with colleagues across the Liverpool City Region in this area.
- **Policy Team, and Performance & Improvement Team:** Work has continued in preparation for the transfer from the Carefirst Children's Social Care system, to the Eclipse system, and officers in both the Policy Team and the Performance and Improvement Team have been working with Children's Social Care colleagues to ensure that data is accurate in readiness for transfer, and that policy documents are in place to support social workers once the new system goes live.
- General policy reviews have continued across service areas as would normally happen, with officers working remotely, via telephone conferencing, Skype, Teams etc.
- The Performance and Improvement Team have also completed and submitted statutory returns to the Department for Education, and also continued to review how best they can work with teams across the department to provide performance improvement support.
- Officers working with some of our commissioned services set up regular Question & Answer sessions for particular provider groups to problem solve/inform etc. This has allowed the flow of communications to continue throughout this time, and ensure that services continue to deliver.

3.8 Inclusion (0-25)

- 3.8.1 • **Halton EP Service** has: Provided guidance to HTs on staff wellbeing post-COVID 19 and also how to support children displaying trauma symptoms (based on advice previously enacted after the Manchester bombing 2018).
- Continued to undertake EHCP assessments and have prioritised pupils with SEMH needs and challenging anxiety-based behaviours for face-to-face visits once social distancing has ended.

- **Specialist Support Teachers:** have continued to support early years settings and schools to accommodate pupils with SEND. This has included bespoke advice and guidance to schools and support with innovative ways of delivering education for pupils with SEND.
- Contributed support to ensure that all pupils with an EHCP in Halton had been appropriately risk assessed for access to school provision throughout lockdown.
- Contributed to the risk assessment and support and challenge role to schools to ensure that Halton is appropriately able to evidence that we have used our best endeavours to ensure that the provision cited in EHCPs is being appropriately delivered
- Delivered virtual training and drop in sessions for schools and early years settings to provide advice and guidance across a range of educational needs including strategies relating to ASD, cognition and learning, sensory impairment and physical disabilities.
- **Assessment and Provision:** unlike many other local authorities Halton has maintained its education, health and care plan assessment and practice in line with statutory requirements. All assessments of need and new plans since the 19th March have remained on track and provision and support put in place. This has been done through practice innovation and flexibility in approach to ensure that virtual meetings and assessments are taking place.
- Co-ordinated the Risk Assessment processes and supported schools to ensure that risk assessments are in place for each pupil with an education, health and care plan. This amounts to 979 individual risk assessments.
- Despite remaining open to new requests to assess for EHCPs the team has significantly improved its timeliness rates from a low point in 2019. Timeliness for new plans issued in May 2020 was above the national average and overall timeliness for 2020 is 9 percentage points higher than 2019.
- The time during lockdown had been used to eradicate a backlog of work and clear almost all outstanding EHCPs. Those that remain are due to challenges in arranging provision with schools understandably challenged by the limitations imposed on them by national guidance.
- Offer to families of a reassessment once their child or young person is back in full time education is they feel it is necessary. This has only been made possible by the efforts made to clear

outstanding plans.

- Manage the Best Endeavours process to ensure that education providers, health service and social care continue to deliver the provision set out in EHCPs for some of Halton's most vulnerable children and young people, or can demonstrate that they have used their best endeavours in trying to do so.

Information, Advice and Support: throughout lockdown Halton's SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs Information Advice and Support Service) has continued to offer up to date advice and support to the families of children and young people with SEND. The Local Offer website has been continuously updated as a one stop shop for online advice and guidance regarding family support.

3.9 **Broader Council Support**

- 3.9.1
- Provided a comprehensive transition package of support which includes guidance, curriculum resources including for recovery, strategies etc.
 - Updated Psychological First Aid training and recommended that it is undertaken by frontline staff including school-facing services and school staff;
 - Services have collaborated to develop updated guidance on transition for all children and have provided additional advice, strategies and templates for use for children displaying SEMH needs or challenging behaviour.
 - Fast tracked plans for a bespoke Secondary SEMH Re-integration and Outreach Service commissioned in collaboration with the PRU, specifically for pupils who display SEMH needs and challenging behaviour.
 - With wider school opening we have resumed our pilot focusing on ACES that was suspended at the beginning of COVID19. This is a multi-agency approach to support our schools.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 None identified.

5.0 **OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 None identified.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

The key focus of the Department throughout COVID 19 has been to support schools and settings and parents and carers and to continue to provide good quality, timely support advice and guidance.

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

None identified.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

None identified.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

None identified.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None identified.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 Given the sometimes conflicting messages to schools and settings the Department to has been keen to provide some clarity and support through daily briefings, weekly liaison with each sector, regular meetings with the Dioceses, weekly meetings with trade union colleagues. When necessary issues have been raised directly with the Department for Education.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 Schools have been encouraged to encourage their vulnerable learners including those with EHCPs back to school. Where this has not been possible a risk assessments and regular contact with these pupils has been undertaken.

8.2 Year 10 pupils on free school meals and those pupils in CIC, Care Leavers or with a social worker have been issued with a laptop. It has not always been possible to issue each child but at least one laptop has been issued per family.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
DFE Guidance to schools and settings	DFE Website	Ann McIntyre – Operational Director- Education, Inclusion and Provision