



Executive Board

**Thursday, 23 October 2025 2.00 p.m.
The Boardroom, Municipal Building**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Alcock', is centered on the page.

Interim Chief Executive

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

PART 1

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1. MINUTES	1 - 13
2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST	
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.	
3. HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY PORTFOLIO	
(A) HALTON HOUSING ANNUAL REPORT	14 - 21
4. LEADER'S PORTFOLIO	

*Please contact Gill Ferguson 0151 511 8059 or
gill.ferguson@halton.gov.uk for further information.
The next meeting of the Committee is on Thursday, 13 November 2025*

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PART II In this case the Board has a discretion to exclude the press and public and, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, it is RECOMMENDED that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, having been satisfied that in all the circumstances of the case the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.	
9. HEALTH AND WELLBEING PORTFOLIO	
(A) DIRECT AWARD OF THE HALTON INTEGRATED SEXUAL HEALTH PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE CONTRACT 2026 VIA PROVIDER SELECTION REGIME – DIRECT AWARD PROCESS C. WARRINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL WILL BE THE LEAD COMMISSIONING AUTHORITY - KEY DECISION	69 - 78

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.

EXECUTIVE BOARD

At a meeting of the Executive Board on Thursday, 11 September 2025 in The Boardroom, Municipal Building

Present: Councillors Wharton (Chair), Bevan, Ball, Dennett, Harris, T. McInerney, P. Nolan, Thompson, Wall and Wright

Apologies for Absence: None

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: E. Dawson, S. Wallace-Bonner, Z. Fearon, G. Cook, G. Ferguson, R. Rout, D. Cooke and L. Wilson-Lagan

Also in attendance: None

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

Action

EXB28 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2025, were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

LEADER'S PORTFOLIO

EXB29 URGENT DECISION

The Board received a report from the Chief Executive, which provided information on urgent decisions taken since the last meeting of the Board.

It was noted that the Council's Constitution gave authority to the Chief Executive to take urgent decisions, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Director Finance and/or the Director Legal and Democratic Services, where necessary.

One urgent decision had been made since the last meeting of the Board and full details were published on the Council's website.

RESOLVED: That the urgent decision taken since

the last meeting of the Executive Board be noted.

CORPORATE SERVICES PORTFOLIO

EXB30 NEW RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY

The Board was presented with a revised Risk Management Policy which had been drafted in conjunction with Zurich Municipal, the Council's insurers. The aim of the Policy was to provide direction and alignment to current Risk Management processes across the Council Directorates.

RESOLVED: That the Board approves the updated Risk Management Policy, with the changes outlined in Section 3.3 of the report.

Interim
Executive

Chief

EXB31 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY

The Board considered a report that set out the development of the Council's new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, a copy of which was attached as an appendix. The Policy set out in detail how the Council met its duties and responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

RESOLVED: That the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy be approved.

EXB32 2025/26 COUNCILWIDE SPENDING AS AT 31 JULY 2025

The Board received a report from the Director – Finance, which reported the Council's overall revenue net spending position as of 31 July 2025, together with a 2025/26 forecast outturn position.

A summary of spending against the operational revenue budget position as at 31 July was presented in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 and these provided detailed figures for each individual Department. In overall terms net spending as at 31 July 2025 was £1.629m over budget. The outturn forecast for the year estimated that net spend would be over the approved budget by £5.572m. It was noted that the forecast position remained a matter of great concern and action needed to be taken to reduce net spend immediately.

The report detailed a review of the Council General Reserve as at 31 July 2025 it remained unchanged from the previous period at £5.149m.

Members were advised that Council had previously approved the capital programme for 2025/26 at its meeting

on 5 March 2025. Since then, the capital programme had been revised to reflect a number of changes in spending profiles and funding as schemes had been developed. Appendix 4 brought all the separate elements together and outlined the Council's total planned capital programme expenditure.

RESOLVED: That

Director of
Finance

- 1) Executive Directors continue to implement the approved 2025/26 saving proposals as detailed in Appendix 3;
- 2) Executive Directors continue to identify areas where they can further reduce their directorate's spending or generate income, in order to ensure the Council wide forecast outturn overspend position for the year remains within budget;
- 3) the report be shared with each Policy and Performance Board, in order to ensure they have a full appreciation of the councilwide financial position, in addition to their specific areas of responsibility; and
- 4) Council be asked to approve the revisions to the capital programme set-out in paragraph 3.24 and incorporated within Appendix 4.

EXB33 MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2026/27 – 2030/31 - KEY DECISION

The Board received a report from the Director – Finance, which included an update on the Council's Medium Term Financial Forecast (MTFS) for the period 2026/27 to 2030/31. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy set out the five-year projection of the Council's resources and spending and was based on the most recent information that was currently available. The forecast showed that it was vital that a significant level of budget saving were achieved over the next five years, the scale of which would be extremely difficult to implement.

It was noted that the Government had confirmed that there would be significant and wide-ranging changes introduced to the local government finance system in 2026/27, known as the Fair Funding Review. The aim of the review was to target funding where it was most needed by using updated funding formulae to determine the different needs and costs faced by individual authorities, as well as their ability to raise revenue locally through Council Tax. A

consultation was issued in June with a closing date of 15 August 2025. The potential impact of the Fair Funding Review for Halton was set out in Medium Term Financial Strategy at Appendix 1.

Reason(s) for Decision

To seek approval for the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2026/27 to 2030/31.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

The alternative option of not maintaining a MTFS had been considered. However, this would not follow good financial management practice, as the MTFS was a key element in informing the Council's financial planning and budget setting processes.

Implementation Date

1 April 2026.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Medium-Term Financial Strategy presented in Appendix 1, be approved;
- 2) the 2026/27 base budget be prepared on the basis of the underlying assumptions set out in the Strategy;
- 3) the Reserves and Balances Strategy presented in Appendix 2 be approved; and
- 4) the award of Council Tax Support for 2025/26 remains at the 2025/26 level of 21.55%.

Director of Finance

EXB34 FINANCIAL RECOVERY PLAN

The Board considered a report of the Director - Finance, which outlined the Council's Financial Recovery position and provided options for the Council to achieve a sustainable budget position by the year 2030/31. The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) showed that based upon current levels of spend, income and forecast growth in service costs and demand across the Council, by 2030/31 the cumulative deficit or funding gap on the Council's budget would have reached £118.613m. The position was unsustainable, and action must be taken over the MFTS period to ensure the Council had a balanced budget position by 2030/31 at the latest, removing the

dependency upon Exceptional Financial Support. The report set out proposals regarding action that must be taken to ensure this was achieved.

In addition to the financial forecast included with the MTFS, the report provided a summary of two scenarios with a potential budget deficit position for each. Executive Directors were asked to take immediate action to identify the savings, cost control and income generation proposals identified under scenario B.

Members were also provided with detailed information on a benchmarking exercise undertaken to review the Council cost base across a number of services and this was compared to its nearest neighbour group.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the report be noted;
- 2) benchmarking information be used to start the process of setting departmental budget reductions for the period 2026/27 to 2030/31;
- 3) Executive Directors supported by the Transformation Delivery Unit provide options for the Transformation Board, regarding how budget reductions on the scale outlined within this report might be achieved, along with details of the associated service delivery implications; and
- 4) Executive Directors identify specific budget savings proposals to be implemented from 1 April 2026 as a matter of urgency, utilising the template in Appendix B, in order to support setting the 2026/27 budget.

Director of Finance

EXB35 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25

The Board considered a report from the Director – Finance, which presented the Treasury Management Annual Report 2024-25.

The report updated Members on the activities undertaken on the money market, as required by the Treasury Management Policy.

Information was provided on the economic outlook, interest rate forecast, borrowing and investments, budget monitoring, new long-term borrowing, policy guidelines and treasury management indicators. The Council's approved

Treasury and Prudential Indicators for 2024-25 were set out in the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and was attached as Appendix one.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

EXB36 CARE EXPERIENCED AS A 'PROTECTED CHARACTERISTIC'

The Board received a report of the Executive Director - Children's Services, that outlined the need to recognise children in care and care experienced young people as a locally protected characteristic under the Equalities Act to promote lifelong care and protection for this group of young people. It was aimed to end the discrimination that young people faced when presenting to other services and partnerships, as well as to ensure that all policies ensured consideration for this group of young people under a protected characteristic to prevent discrimination.

RESOLVED: That the Board agree that the Council recognises the 'Care Experienced' as a protected characteristic.

Executive Director
of Children's
Services

EXB37 YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN (ANNUAL UPDATE)

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director - Children's Services, which presented an annual refresh of the Youth Justice Plan for the sub-regional Youth Justice Service. This was in compliance with the Youth Justice Board Guidance (Ministry of Justice) and Regulation 4 of the 'Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000'.

Halton had a shared service arrangement for Youth Justice Services with the other three Local Authorities in the sub-region and as such the Governance arrangements for Youth Justice were overseen by a pan Cheshire Partnership Management Board. In line with legislative requirements the updated Youth Justice Plan had been refreshed and was attached as Appendix 1. The Plan included comprehensive performance data updated for the 2024/25 financial year and was produced in partnership with Cheshire Police and other statutory partners following consultation with service users.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Board notes the update on performance and

Executive Director
of Children's
Services

progress made against priority areas during the financial year April 2024 to March 2025 set out in the refreshed and updated Youth Justice Strategic Plan for Cheshire (attached as Appendix 1); and

- 2) approves the content of the 2025-26 Youth Justice Strategic Plan for Cheshire and agrees to it being presented to Council for approval.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE PORTFOLIO

EXB38 HALTON BOROUGH COUNCIL ADULT SOCIAL CARE - CARE QUALITY COMMISSION (CQC) ASSESSMENT OUTCOME

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director - Adult Services that provided details of the outcome of the Council's Adult Social Care CQC Assessment. The assessment process officially began back in October 2024 and culminated in an onsite CQC visit that took place 17 to 19 March 2025. The final report was published on 4 July 2025 and was attached as Appendix 1. Halton's Adult Social Care Services had been rated overall as Good. An Improvement Plan had been developed and was attached as Appendix 2.

RESOLVED: That the Board note the contents of the report and associated appendices.

COMMUNITY SAFETY PORTFOLIO

EXB39 DOMESTIC ABUSE ACCOMMODATION

The Board considered a report that sought a waiver in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 iv of part 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders to allow the continuation of a contract with SHAP (St Helens Accommodation Project) to deliver on behalf of the Council, the Domestic Abuse Supported Accommodation Service, for a period of one year from 11 January 2026 to 10 January 2027.

The request for authorisation of a waiver rather than implementing a tender process was due to the following:

- the current service was well known and performing well and met all required expectations. In the current situation it would be difficult for a new provider to become established as it was a specialist provision; and

- the contract delivered on a statutory duty to provide refuge accommodation, there could be no gap in service provision.

RESOLVED: That the Board approves the contract with SHAP that expires on 10 January 2026 to be extended for twelve months without going through the procurement process, in pursuance of Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 (non-emergency procedures – exceeding a value threshold of £100,000), seeking to waive part 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders.

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

EMPLOYMENT, LEARNING AND SKILLS, AND COMMUNITY PORTFOLIO

EXB40 DCBL STADIUM - NEW PAVA SYSTEM AND STRUCTURAL STEEL MAINTENANCE WORKS AND PITCH REPLACEMENT

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director - Environment and Regeneration, that sought Member approval to proceed with necessary works to the Public Address Voice Alarm (PAVA) System, the Structural Steelwork Repairs and replacement Pitch at the DCBL Stadium as identified in the report.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Capital works identified in the report in sections 3.3 to 3.6 be approved;
- 2) consideration be given to the options outlined in paragraph 5.4 below regarding how the annual capital financing costs might be funded;
- 3) Council be asked to add works to the capital programme and include a financial contribution of £1.325m, subject to further work to establish detailed costs, and to proceed with an option to include the implementation of a PAVA system and undertake steel repairs to four stands only. This is to ensure the ongoing safety of the public when using the premises. A decision on options relating to the pitch to be deferred; and
- 4) approval of the detailed costs and the option to be undertaken, be delegated to the Executive Director Environment and Regeneration, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Employment Learning, Skills and Community and the Portfolio Holder for

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

Community Safety.

ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL PORTFOLIO

EXB41 REVIEW OF THE MERSEYSIDE AND HALTON JOINT WASTE LOCAL PLAN

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director - Environment and Regeneration, which provided an update on the review of the Merseyside and Halton Joint Waste Local Plan (JWLP). The JWLP set the framework for waste related planning.

It was noted that the 2025 JWLP document reviewed the original 2013 policies to understand whether they were fit for purpose and in line with Local and National Policy. The report concluded that most of the policies in the plan remained fit for purpose. A copy of the review of the JWLP was attached as an Appendix to the report.

RESOLVED: That the Board notes the review and accepts the outcome of the review of the Joint Waste Local Plan.

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

EXB42 WASTE MANAGEMENT UPDATE

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director - Environment and Regeneration, that provided an update on a number of matters in relation to the Council's Waste Management Services, including options to help meet legislative requirements, proposed contractual arrangements for the processing of collected recyclable materials, proposed recycling collection methodologies and potential financial implications were known at this stage.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) endorse that the Council provides to the Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority, as outlined commitment for Halton to be included in their procurement of new Waste Management and Recycling Contract arrangements that are to be introduced from 2029;
- 2) approve that, following the introduction of food waste collections in 2026, Halton's collected food waste is managed by the Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority under the terms of the Waste Management and Recycling Contract;

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

- 3) approve that the Council collects 'Additional Materials' for recycling as part of household kerbside collections from 2026, at temporary additional cost, until the new Merseyside Recycling the Waste Authority Waste Management and Recycling contract is in place;
- 4) endorse that the Council retains a co-mingled recycling collection system from 2026 onwards (subject to a TEEP Assessment being carried out);
- 5) approve that the Council introduces the additional resources required to deliver a comprehensive, local waste communications and education campaign, and also approves the required expenditure to do so; and
- 6) delegated authority be given to the Executive Director - Environment and Regeneration, in consultation with the Environment and Urban Renewal Portfolio Holder, to take any decisions as may be necessary as part of Halton's inclusion in the Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authorities re-procurement exercise of the Waste Management and Recycling Contract.

**HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY
AND ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL
PORTFOLIOS**

**EXB43 ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION - REMOVAL OF PERMITTED
DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS FOR THE CHANGE OF USE
FROM USE CLASS C3 (DWELLING HOUSES) TO C4
(HMOS) - KEY DECISION**

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director - Environment and Regeneration, that sought approval to remove the permitted development rights for the change of use from Use Class C3 (dwelling houses) to C4 (HMOs). The report advised that Local Planning Authorities had the power, in exceptional circumstances, to withdraw permitted development rights through the making of an Article 4 direction. This meant that deemed planning permission would not be granted automatically and an application needed to be made to the Council. It did not prohibit development but enabled the Council to have some control over the proposed development and to apply its own policies.

The report set out the type of Article 4 directions, the proposed local areas where it was required, together with evidence and justification, the procedure and the timescales

involved to obtain Article 4 direction.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the making of an immediate Article 4 Direction to remove permitted development rights for the change of use from Use Class C3 (dwelling houses) to C4 (HMOs) as set out at Appendix 4 be approved;
- 2) the required notifications as set out in the report and the publication of a public notice as shown in Appendix C be authorised;
- 3) following notification and consultation, the matter is brought back to the Board to consider any consultation responses and make a decision on whether to confirm the immediate Article 4 Direction;
- 4) authority is delegated to the Director of Planning and Transportation in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Environmental Sustainability to amend the Houses in Multiple Occupation Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to include the making of the article 4 direction; and
- 5) it was noted that this proposal is a key decision which has not been included on the Council's Forward Plan and the procedure set down in Rule 16 of the Access to information Procedure Rules of the Constitution have been followed.

Director -
Planning and
Transportation

EXB44 SCHEDULE 12A OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

The Board considered:

- 1) whether Members of the press and public should be excluded from the meeting of the Board during consideration of the following item of business in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 because it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be considered, exempt information would be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972; and
- 2) whether the disclosure of information was in the public interest, whether any relevant exemptions were

applicable and whether, when applying the public interest test and exemptions, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed that in disclosing the information.

RESOLVED: That as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed that in disclosing the information, members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 because it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business, exempt information would be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

EMPLOYMENT LEARNING AND SKILLS AND COMMUNITY PORTFOLIO

EXB45 SUSTAINABILITY OPTIONS FOR HALTON PEOPLE INTO JOBS

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director - Environment and Regeneration, that sought approval for a sustainable funding option for the Council's Halton People Into Jobs Service when existing funding streams came to an end in March 2026.

RESOLVED: That the proposed sustainable funding option outlined in the report be approved.

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

CORPORATE SERVICES PORTFOLIO

EXB46 VOLUNTARY SEVERANCE SCHEME

The Board considered a report of the Interim Chief Executive, that provided details of options for the introduction of a Voluntary Severance Scheme.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) note the options contained in the report in relation to Voluntary Redundancy approvals and the introduction of a Voluntary Severance Scheme; and
- 2) acknowledge that further work to draw up an operational scheme would be required and a report would be brought back for consideration and approval.

Interim Chief
Executive

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

EXB47 FUNDING FOR EXTENSION

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director - Children's Services, that set out a proposal for a loan agreement to build an extension on a property to accommodate four children in care.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the loan be agreed, subject to the legal and financial arrangements being finalised in detail and due diligence being undertaken; and
- 2) the Executive Director of Children's Services be asked to finalise the details of the arrangement in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People.

Executive Director
of Children's
Services

MINUTES ISSUED: 18 September 2025

CALL-IN: 25 September 2025 at 5.00 pm.

Any matter decided by the Executive Board may be called in no later than 5.00pm on 25 September 2025.

Meeting ended at 2.40 p.m.

REPORT TO:	Executive Board
DATE:	23 October 2025
REPORTING OFFICER:	Chief Executive – Halton Housing
PORTFOLIO:	Housing and Environmental Sustainability
SUBJECT:	Halton Housing Annual Report
WARD(S)	Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides an update on Halton Housing’s activities since the last report to Executive Board on the 24 October 2024.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION:

That the report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Sam Scott, Group Chief Executive, will attend the meeting to present the report. He will be accompanied by other members of the Halton Housing Executive Team and Board

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no policy implications arising from this report.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None identified.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL’S PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

A quality, affordable, and safe home plays a key part in the health of individuals.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

Halton Housing is an active developer of new homes within the Borough. It is also a member of the Runcorn Town Board and is actively involved in the regeneration of Runcorn town centre.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

Halton Housing homes are allocated to people who cannot purchase their own home or rent from the private sector.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

Halton Housing works in partnership with others to address inequality continue including working with charities, community groups and partners to support initiatives such as the school uniform campaign and local food banks.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

Halton Housing successfully delivered its first on site retro fit project on time to budget which has improved the EPC rating of the homes D to A.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

Halton Housing supports the Council to create thriving neighbourhoods, and tackle issues that matter such as anti-social behaviour.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 Regular meetings between the Halton Housing and the Council take place to discuss a range of issues and to explore risks.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 None identified.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None identified.

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

10.1 None under the meaning of the Act.



Annual Report to HBC Executive Board

October 2025

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Halton Housing, like most housing associations, is operating in a challenging environment. Government imposed constraints on rental income together with increasing costs and new consumer regulation has reduced financial capacity.
- 3.1 Our three-year Corporate Plan to March 2025 outlined our commitment to our customers and the wider borough.
- 3.2 Our key achievements for 2024/25 include:
- Customer satisfaction levels across all 12 TSM perception measures have increased compared to 2024/25 performance. Performance against the Management Information TSM measures is now showing median or upper quartile performance against all metrics.
 - There has been significant and sustained improvement in repairs service delivery.
 - Compliance across five out of six building safety measures was 100% at the end of March 2025 and represents upper quartile performance.
 - Performance against our target to have 86% of our homes with a stock condition survey of no more than five years old has been achieved with a year-end figure of 89.5%. This performance remains upper quartile for our region.
 - We co-ordinated many community events such as: Community clean up days, Spruce up your Streets activities, tree and bulb planting, digital arts and technology sessions, welfare benefits and advice sessions, tree and bulb planting, school uniform support, Christmas hampers, funding and donations, cookery sessions, Keep Warm, Keep Well events.
 - Financial performance has been good, and we were regraded to V1 by the RSH.
 - We exited and closed both defined benefit pension schemes whilst maintaining high levels of colleague satisfaction, low turnover, and sickness absence.

- External accreditations include a gold award by the HBC Health Inclusion Team, nominations for Employer of the Year and Outstanding Contribution to the Local Community at the Halton Business Awards, retained our IIP Gold award and renewed the Cyber Essentials+ certification.

3.3 Our new three-year Corporate Plan, Our Future Focus 2025 – 2028 (OFF), outlines our commitment to our customers and the wider borough. Our purpose at HH is “improving people’s lives.” We want to provide customers with a safe place to call home, and the opportunity to lead happier, healthier, and more fulfilled lives.

2. Introduction

2.1 Halton Housing, like most housing associations, is operating in a challenging environment. Government imposed constraints on rental income together with increasing costs and new consumer regulation has reduced financial capacity.

2.2 Our key achievements for 2024/25 include:

- Customer satisfaction levels across all 12 TSM perception measures have increased compared to 2024/25 performance. Performance against the Management Information TSM measures is now showing median or upper quartile performance against all metrics.
- There has been significant and sustained improvement in repairs service delivery.
- Compliance across five out of six building safety measures was 100% at the end of March 2025 and represents upper quartile performance.
- Performance against our target to have 86% of our homes with a stock condition survey of no more than five years old has been achieved with a year-end figure of 89.5%. This performance remains upper quartile for our region.
- We co-ordinated many community events such as: Community clean up days, Spruce up your Streets activities, tree and bulb planting, digital arts and technology sessions, welfare benefits and advice sessions, tree and bulb planting, school uniform support, Christmas hampers, funding and donations, cookery sessions, Keep Warm, Keep Well events.
- Financial performance has been good, and we were regraded to V1 by the RSH.
- We exited and closed both defined benefit pension schemes whilst maintaining high levels of colleague satisfaction, low turnover, and sickness absence.
- External accreditations include a gold award by the HBC Health Inclusion Team, nominations for Employer of the Year and Outstanding Contribution to the Local Community at the Halton Business Awards, retained our IIP Gold award and renewed the Cyber Essentials+ certification.

3. Main Challenges

3.1 At the end of 2024/25 main challenges included:

- Customer complaints and ASB volumes have increased compared to the previous year.
- An increase in the number of determinations by the Housing Ombudsman Service during the year, a trend that is being experienced right across the housing sector.
- The implementation of Awaab's Law from October 2025.
- Additional investment is needed in our existing homes.
- The delivery of new homes impacted by contractor delays, contractor availability, planning delays and high build costs.
- Uncertainty of what the future rent settlement agreement and other government funding will be.

4. Our Future Focus 2025 – 2028

4.1 Our three-year Corporate Plan outlines our commitment to our customers and the wider borough. Our purpose at HH is “improving people’s lives.” We want to provide customers with a safe place to call home, and the opportunity to lead happier, healthier, and more fulfilled lives.

4.2 Following a consultation and engagement programme with customers, colleagues, stakeholders, and Board, the Corporate Plan Our Future Focus 2025 – 2028 (OFF) has been developed for the next three years. It focuses on the things that matter to our customers, colleagues, and partners.

4.3 OFF includes five priorities that will guide our work over the next three years.

1. Quality Homes. Creating homes that are fit for the future.
2. Excellent Services. Doing what we say we will.
3. Thriving Communities. Working together to create great places to live.
4. Great People. Passionate people achieving great outcomes.
5. Strong Business. Be an ambitious, resilient, and responsible business.

- 4.4 Each year we will develop annual commitments aligned to OFF. These commitments will be underpinned by Strategic Action Plans to ensure we have the resources and focus to deliver the commitments.

5. Key Priorities

- 5.1 Our key priorities for 2025/26 include:

- Prioritise the improvement of our repairs service.
- Implement a new approach to tenancy and neighbourhood management service.
- Co-create a new Halton Housing Deal to re-set the relationship with our customers.
- Work with partners to improve the health and wellbeing of our communities.
- Work with partners to improve access to employment, skills, and training in our communities.
- Implement our new Customer Influence Framework
- Work with partners to further improve our approach to tackling anti-social behaviour.
- Co-create Community Improvement Plans where they are most needed.
- Review our service standards for internal and external shared space.
- Increase our investment in existing homes by 12% to £9m.
- Develop the Halton Home Standard
- Continue to improve the energy efficiency of our homes.
- Deliver 120 new homes.
- Consider options for the regeneration of Runcorn Waterfront
- Develop a Strategic Partnership Plan to leverage expertise and capacity and strengthen our core reputation.

REPORT TO: Executive Board
DATE: 23 October 2025
REPORTING OFFICER: Chief Executive
PORTFOLIO: Leader
SUBJECT: Urgent Decisions
WARDS: Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To bring to the attention of Executive Board urgent decision/s taken since the last meeting.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the report is noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Council's Constitution gives authority to the Chief Executive to take urgent decision/s which are required before the next formal meeting of Executive Board.

These must be made in consultation with the Leader of the Council where practicable, and with the Operational Director – Finance and/or Operational Director – Legal and Democratic Services, where necessary. They must also be reported for information to the next practically available meeting of the Board.

- 3.2 More information on each can be found on the Council's website:

<http://councillors.halton.gov.uk/mgDelegatedDecisions.aspx?bcr=1>

- 3.3 The urgent decision/s taken since the last meeting of Executive Board:

Date Decision taken	Decision details
28 August 2025	Hospital Discharge Proactive Approach Project

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are none other than the constitutional requirement to report urgent decisions for information.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

None.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 The report is for information, and there are no risk issues arising from it.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 None.

9. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no climate change implications.

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

10.1 No background papers were used in the preparation of this report. Further information on the decision/s taken is available from the link in Paragraph 3.2.

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 23 October 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Director of HR & Corporate Affairs (Interim)

PORTFOLIO: Corporate Services

SUBJECT: Pensions Discretions Statement 2025/26 revised.

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Council is required to publish a Pensions Discretion Statement annually, to advise the discretions it intends to exercise under the Local Government Pension Scheme (LPGS).
- 1.2 This report accompanies the proposed revised statement for 2025/26

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board approves the revised Pensions Discretions Statement for 2025/26.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Pensions Discretion Statement for 2025/26 is based upon the statement for 2024/25, which was approved by Executive Board in February 2024. The Pension discretion Statement for 2025/26 was approved by Executive Board in March 2025.
- 3.2 There has been a revision to the agreed Pensions Discretion Statement 2025/26 incorporating the element to reflect the implementation of the unpaid leave element as required by pensions fund.
- 3.3 There have been no material changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013 that would result in a change to the statement. Regulation 60 of those regulations sets out what the statement should contain, and the statement is compliant.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Council is required to publish a written policy statement on how it will exercise its discretions provided by the scheme. The

policies adopted seek to achieve the correct balance between cost to the council tax payer, good employee relations and staff recruitment and retention

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are financial implications for the Council in considering the application of these discretions. Each case will be different, and a business case will be required when such a discretion is exercised, balancing the interests of the Council with the interests of the individual.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

None

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

None

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

None

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

None

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

None

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

None

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 The statement complies with the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013, and enables the Council to make balanced decisions taking into account all risks.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 The recommendations will apply equally to all staff who are members of the LGPS. Employees have a right of appeal if they feel they have been treated incorrectly/unfairly.

8.2 In the first instance, appeals are made to the Head of HR Operations, who acts in the capacity of the Independent Person for the Independent Disputes and Resolution Procedure.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 No climate change implications

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
The Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013 (Statutory Instrument 2013 No. 2356)	Municipal Building, Kingsway, Widnes	Hayley Hamlett Head of HR Operations

PENSIONS DISCRETIONS STATEMENT 2025/26

HALTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

Introduction

This statement is prepared and published in accordance with the requirements of Regulation 60 (1) of the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013, which states that;

A Scheme employer must prepare a written statement of its policy in relation to the exercise of its functions under regulations –

- (a) 16(2)(e) and 16(4)(d) (funding of additional pension);
- (b) 30(6) (flexible retirement);
- (c) 30(8) (waiving of actuarial reduction); and
- (d) 31 (award of additional pension),

and an administering authority must prepare such a statement in relation to the exercise of its functions under regulation 30(8) in cases where a former employer has ceased to be a Scheme employer. This statement fulfils that requirement.

There are no material changes to the discretions contained within this statement for 2025/26.

Where relevant, monetary amounts used within the explanations of discretions have been revised as appropriate.

This document is confirmed as the Council's Pensions Discretions Statement for the financial year 2025/26.

The discretions will be exercised by the appropriate Executive Director, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, and Operational Director Finance. (In the case of applications from Executive Directors or the Chief Executive, the discretions will be exercised by the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and Corporate Director – Chief Executive's Delivery Unit).

Any questions relating to this statement should be directed to:

Pay & Pensions Team (HR Operations)
HR Operations Division,
Chief Executives Directorate,
Halton Borough Council,
Municipal, Building,
Kingsway,
Widnes, WA8 7QF
e-mail: payandpensions@halton.gov.uk

**COMPULSORY POLICY STATEMENTS IN ACCORDANCE WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT
PENSION SCHEME REGULATIONS 2013**

Regulation 16 (2) (e) & 16 (4) (d)

Ability to contribute to a shared cost additional pension contribution (APC) scheme.

Explanation:

Where an active scheme member wishes to purchase extra annual pension of up to £8,344 (2024/25 rate) by making an Additional Pension Contribution (APC) the employer may voluntarily contribute towards the cost of purchasing that extra pension via a Shared Cost Additional Pension Contribution (SCAPC).

HBC decision:

A SCAPC will only be entered into when the member decides that they wish to make an APC in order to repay the loss of pension which they have suffered from the purchase of unpaid leave relating to the Christmas shutdown period.

As long as the member enters into the APC contract by the 31st March of the leave year in which they wish to repay the loss of pension (i.e. 31st March 2026 for the unpaid leave purchased in 2025/26) then the Council will contribute two thirds of the cost of repayment. All other APC contracts will be funded in full by the member.

Regulation 30 (6)

Ability to award Flexible Retirement

Explanation:

A member who is aged 55 or over and with their employers consent reduces their hours/or grade, can then, but only with the agreement of the employer, make an election to the administering authority to receive all or part payment of their accrued benefits without having retired from that employment.

HBC decision:

The Council will adopt this discretion and will assess applications from those employees aged 55 and over who reduce their hours by 25% (not for a grade reduction). Applications will be considered on the basis of future service provision and cost. The decision to release benefits will be taken by the appropriate Executive Director.

Regulation 30 (8)

Waiving of Actuarial Reduction on Flexible Retirement and early retirement (age 55+)

Explanation:

Employers can elect to waive some or all of the reduction on benefits if a member chooses to take flexible retirement and take their benefits before Normal Pension Age (NPA)

HBC decision:

HBC will only waive actuarial reduction on flexible retirement in exceptional circumstances.

Transitional Protections – Regulation 1 (1) (c) Schedule 2

Power of the Employing Authority to “switch on” the 85 year rule for a member voluntarily drawing benefits on or after age 55 and before age 60.

Explanation:

A member who meets the 85 year rule and elects to draw their pension benefits from age 55 will no longer require their employers consent if they retire after 31st March 2014. However, certain members will lose some 85 year rule protections if they wish to draw their pension between age 55 and 60.

An employer may decide to “switch on” protection to the 85 year rule for a member who voluntarily retires from age 55 but before age 60 and meet any additional cost of the retirement.

HBC decision:

In exceptional circumstances, where this is in the interest of the Council and the costs of allowing such requests are considered against the benefits to the Council, the Council will pay the additional cost of an unreduced pension.

Regulation 31

Ability to grant additional pension to an active member or within 6 months of ceasing to be an active member by reason of redundancy or business efficiency.

Explanation:

An employer may decide to award a member additional pension up to a limit of £8,344 per year (or revised amount as stated in the scheme rules) payable from the same date as their pension is payable.

HBC decision:

The Council will not award additional pension.

NON COMPULSORY DISCRETIONS

Regulation 9 (3)

Contributions Payable by an Active Member.

Explanation:

Employers must assess the appropriate rate of contribution band, in a reasonable and consistent manner and review the contribution bands on any material change in pay.

HBC decision:

The Council will review contribution bands annually or at a significant change, unless an employee exercises their right to appeal their band allocation when the review may be conducted earlier.

Regulation 22 (7) & (8)

Re-employed and Re-joining Deferred Members

Explanation:

This provision permits an employer the discretion to extend the statutory 12 month window within which a scheme member can elect to aggregate deferred LGPS benefits into their current employment.

HBC decision:

The Council will not normally extend the time limit beyond 12 months.

Regulation 100 (6)

Inward Transfer of Pension Rights

Explanation:

This provision allows an employer the discretion to extend the statutory 12 month window within which a scheme member can elect to transfer benefits from another scheme into their current scheme.

HBC decision:

The Council will not normally extend the time limit beyond 12 months.

Regulation 30 (5)

Ability to Waive Actuarial Reduction on Compassionate Grounds

Explanation:

This regulation provides for early payment of retirement benefits, reduced by the amount shown in actuarial guidance issued by the Secretary of State for Local Government, in relation to an employment, for a scheme member who is not an employee in local government service in that employment, and has not attained normal pension age, but is aged over 55 years.

HBC Decision:

The Council will consider, on a case by case basis, exercising its discretion to waive some or all of the reduction. This will be where it is felt to be in the best interests of the Council as well as the employee (deferred member) and the costs of allowing such requests will be considered against the benefits to the Council.

**Discretion under the
Local Government (Early Termination of Employment) (Discretionary Compensation)
(England and Wales) Regulations 2006.**

The Council is required to formulate, publish and keep under review a statement of policy on how it will exercise its discretion under the Local Government (Early Termination of Employment) (Discretionary Compensation) (England and Wales) Regulations 2006. Such a statement is contained in the Councils Staffing Protocol. It is reproduced here for completeness.

By virtue of regulation 7 (1) of the Local Government (Early Termination of Employment) (Discretionary Compensation) (England and Wales) Regulations 2006 Scheme employers are required to formulate a Statement of Policy on whether it intends to base a redundancy payment on an employee's actual weeks' pay where this exceeds the statutory weeks' pay limit and whether to make a termination payment (inclusive of any redundancy payment) of up to a maximum of 104 weeks' pay (regulation 6 of the Local Government (Early Termination of Employment) (Discretionary Compensation) (England and Wales) Regulations 2006.

The Council will pay a redundancy payment based on actual weeks' pay where this exceeds the redundancy payment and will enhance payments in line with the multiplier applicable at that time and contained in the Councils Staffing Protocol. The multiplier has been set at 1.4, effective from 1st April 2016.

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 23 October 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director of Adults

SUBJECT: All Age Community Care Processes & Next Steps

PORTFOLIO: Health and Wellbeing

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to present a summary of the current operational and financial process for All Age Community Care (AACC) and the associated financial risks facing the council in the current landscape. The report considers the financial impact of the changes Cheshire & Mersey Integrated Care System (C&M ICS) have brought about as part of their financial recovery agenda.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) the financial pressures facing the Community Care budget outlined in the report be noted; and**
- 2) moving forward, financial processes are aligned to reflect contractual financial obligations of the council and C&M ICS.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Community Care Services include residential and nursing care, domiciliary care and direct payments. These services are currently funded in a number of ways, from the council and from the Integrated Commissioning Board (ICB) for Funded Nursing Care (FNC), Continuing Health Care (CHC) and Joint Funding (JF) which includes s117. For context the net spend on Community Care services in 2024/25 was £43.8m, 26% of which related to health spend.
- 3.2 In order to make the payment of services seamless for the care providers, the council currently pays the total care package cost in full and subsequently invoices the ICB for their contribution retrospectively. There is usually a significant delay in ICB settling these invoices which does impact on the council's cashflow position and therefore the amount of interest that can be earned from such balances. The current level of ICB invoices outstanding relating to community care services is £4.445m. In addition, this process is quite labour intensive in terms of administration from raising invoices to debt collection.
- 3.3 In support of the National NHS mandate, C&M ICS have adopted new

processes identified in their financial recovery agenda. AACC is a key focus of this agenda and whilst they are committed to ensuring all primary health needs are met there is no expectation that this will be supported financially through Social Care. C&M ICS have stated they are no longer able to fund elements of Social Care as part of the approval process.

- 3.4 C&M ICS has centralised NHS decision making for all packages of care above £2,000 week. A weekly care package assurance panel has been established consisting of Senior Clinicians, finance representatives and the Chief System Improvement and Delivery Officer. Social care colleagues are also invited but attendance is not compulsory to enabled decision making to be made. All decision making will be based purely on health needs.
- 3.5 Following a decision at this panel communication will be sent to the relevant council advising them of the decisions and the timescale for any amendments to ICB funding. In the case of disagreement on decision making, “next step” will also be communicated.
- 3.6 At present, when a package of care is deemed to be jointly funded by the council and ICB it is automatically assumed the split is 50:50 for each partner. However as part of C&M ICS’s recovery agenda this long standing local agreement will cease and each case will be assessed individually and ICB funding will be agreed based on health care requirements.
- 3.7 To ensure a consistent approach C&M ICS are currently reviewing a clinical tool to support decision making. This review will be clinically led and although Social Care colleagues are encouraged to be part of the process C&M ICS have clarified their attendance is not essential to decision making.
- 3.8 As part of the recovery agenda C&M ICS recommends all joint funded packages should first consider universal services to deliver care requirements and a joint funded package should only be agreed where universal services cannot meet the needs of the person. A 28 day notice will be given where any joint funded package has been reviewed and there is no evidence that a person has any additional health needs beyond those that can be met by universal NHS services. Where a person is found not to be eligible for CHC the ICB will send an email immediately to the council to inform of the decision and provide 14 days’ notice from the date the decision is made.
- 3.9 C&M ICS acknowledge this is a fundamental change to local agreements but it is necessary due to changes to NHS locally, regionally and nationally as they can no longer continue to spend on NHS services at the same rate as previous. This reset is aligned with the evolving National NHS regime.
- 3.10 It is envisaged this change in process will not only shunt costs from the ICB to the council but will also increase the number of invoices disputed by the ICB increasing the level of debt to the council. In order to mitigate the latter, it is recommended the council & ICB commission and pay for their own services provided to residents.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The fundamental change to local agreements by C&M ICS as part of their financial recovery agenda, will impact upon the financial performance of the community care budget this current financial year and if not addressed, in future years the delivery of ASC services may be at risk.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The current level of debt in respect to JF, CHC and FNC invoices and the associated loss of potential interest earned are tabled below:

Funding Source	Outstanding Debt £000	Potential Annual Interest* £000
Joint Funding	2,764	117.47
CHC	1,019	43.31
FNC	662	28.14
TOTAL	4,445	188.92

*Based on the current Money Market Fund Base Rate of 4.25%

5.2 Conclusion

- 5.2.1 The new processes for AACC introduced by C&M ICS will have a significant impact on the Community Care budget this current year and into the future. The council must try to mitigate some of this risk to ensure the overspend against this budget does not run away with itself. One way to do this is to separate the current payment system to care providers so that the council only incurs those debts for which it is liable and not those of the ICB. Although this is not best practice in partnership working the action taken by C&M ICS leaves little option as invoices raised to them may not be honoured in future.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 **Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**

The Adult Social Care budget supports the delivery of services which contribute towards this priority.

6.2 **Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy**

None identified.

6.3 **Supporting Children, Young People and Families**

None identified.

6.4 **Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need**

None.

6.5 **Working Towards a Greener Future**

None identified.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

None identified.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 The change of process implemented by C&M ICS (without local authority agreement) identified within this report will have a significant impact upon the delivery of Adult Social Care services within the Borough. Action should be taken to mitigate some of the financial risk to the council.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 None identified.

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

- 9.1 There are none under the meaning of the Act.

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 23rd October 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director, Adults

PORTFOLIO: Adult Social Care

SUBJECT: Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy for Halton

WARD(S): Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To present the Board with the Adult Social Care (ASC) Workforce Strategy for Halton, for approval.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board

- 1) note the contents of the report; and**
- 2) approve the draft ASC Workforce Strategy for Halton (Attached).**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Early in 2025, Skills for Health were commissioned to work with Halton Borough Council to develop an ASC Workforce Strategy for Halton, to enable and support the local authority and its commissioned services to align the right workforce resources, in the right place, at the right time, with the right skills to further enable an ASC workforce that improves the health and wellbeing of local people to live longer, healthier and more independent lives.

- 3.2 Following extensive engagement which included on line surveys capturing views across the workforce, one to one interviews with operational leaders and analysis of workforce data, vacancy trend, pay benchmarks and training uptake, the strategy is being presented to Executive Board today for approval.

- 3.3 The Strategy sets out:-

- Seven strategic recommendations – from building career pathways to improving pay and fostering collaboration
- Three cross-cutting enablers – reformed commissioning, a centralised workforce hub, and strong system governance
- A commitment to diversity, co-production, and quality

The Strategy is both a response to current pressures and a vision for long-term transformation.

- 3.4 The core components of the Strategy are:-

- Structured career development
- Recruitment and retention innovation

- Fair pay and better working conditions
- Engaged and empowered workforce
- Better use of technology
- Comprehensive training and skills planning
- Cross-sector collaboration

3.5 Implementation would not be seen as a ‘bolt on’ to the strategy; it is the Strategy.

- Year 1 would focus on laying the **Foundations** - co-design, infrastructure, and enabling conditions.
- Year 2 would be **Activation** - delivery of new systems, frameworks, and tools.
- Year 3 would then be focused on **Embedding** - evaluation, scaling, and sustainability.

3.6 The implementation plan would be structured along a linear timeline, over a 3 year period which would:-

- Reference specific strategy recommendations and enablers
- Identify who does what
- Outline inputs, outputs and expected outcomes
- Outline risks and mitigations

3.7 For successful implementation, several assumptions underpin this plan:

- Continued senior sponsorship and alignment with ASC transformation
- Willingness from providers to engage in co-production.
- Resources allocated for the Workforce Hub and core delivery posts
- That commissioning reforms proceed in parallel to operational delivery.
- That the data infrastructure required is made available.
- These are critical for pace and coherence.

3.8 A system wide response is key to the Strategy’s success and it relies on the system playing it’s part, for example Halton Borough Council leading and co-ordinating and providers shaping and delivering.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Specific policy implications in respect to the implementation of the Workforce Strategy are unknown at this time.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Specific financial implications in respect to the implementation of the Workforce Strategy are unknown at this time, however it will require resources from a staff time perspective to support the Strategy’s implementation.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL’S PRIORITIES** [\(click here for list of priorities\)](#)

6.1 **Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**

Having an ASC Workforce Strategy provides significant benefits, including improving recruitment and retention, enhancing staff

development and skills, ensuring a more stable and skilled workforce to meet demand, and ultimately delivering higher-quality care and improved outcomes for individuals in need.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

The Strategy would support the fostering of a strong, diverse and local economy where there is access to good jobs and successful businesses in our community.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

None identified.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

The Strategy would help address inequalities by helping the people of Halton to receive the good quality services that they need to achieve their aspirations and ambitions.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

None identified.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

None identified.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 Market fragility, for example some providers may lack capacity to engage without support, competing pressures on the system and cultural change are acknowledged as potential risks and mitigations include a phased delivery, joint governance and built in feedback loops.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 There are no specific implications arising from the report.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no specific implications arising from the report.

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

10.1 Attached is an abridged version of the strategy, however a full version is available which contains data etc. used to support the contents/recommendation within the strategy.

The full version is available from:-

Damian Nolan: Director, Commissioning & Provision
Damian.Nolan@halton.gov.uk



Halton Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy

Final Draft

26th August 2025



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Executive summary

A shared vision for Halton's workforce

Halton's adult social care system supports some of the most vulnerable people in our community, older adults, those living with disabilities, and individuals with complex needs. But the sector is under increasing pressure: more people need care, their needs are becoming more complex, and the workforce itself is ageing and under strain.

This strategy sets out how we can meet these challenges by building a workforce that is resilient, skilled, and truly valued; where people are supported to stay, to grow, and to make a lasting difference.

The vision here is to create a workforce that sees care not just as a job, but as a meaningful, long-term career. That means investing in people, supporting wellbeing, and making Halton a place where great care staff want to work and stay.

Understanding the challenge

Halton's population is growing older, with the number of people aged 65 and over expected to rise by 40% in the next 10 years. At the same time, Halton faces higher-than-average rates of heart disease and dementia. This means more demand for care, and more complex care needs.

But while demand is rising, the workforce is shrinking. A third of staff are over 55, and only 9% are under 30. Many are leaving the sector, and vacancies are growing. Pay is often lower than in neighbouring areas, and job security is still a concern, especially with the numbers of zero-hours contracts.

And yet there are strengths to build on. Halton's turnover is lower than the national average, and many local residents already provide unpaid care, experience that could be valuable if the right support and flexibility is in place.

This strategy recognises both the challenges and the opportunities. It sets out practical, joined-up action, so that Halton's care sector becomes not only more sustainable, but a better place to work.



What needs to happen

To move from short-term fixes to lasting change, we are focusing on seven key priorities:



1. **Career progression for all**

The creation of a clear career framework that shows how people can move from entry-level roles to leadership positions. This will include recognised qualifications, apprenticeships, mentoring, and guidance; helping people grow and stay in the sector.



2. **Smarter, fairer recruitment**

We'll reach more people: from school leavers to those returning to work, through targeted campaigns, outreach, and values-based recruitment. New pre-employment courses will give people a pathway into the sector, with guaranteed interviews on completion.



3. **Enhancing pay and conditions**

Work to reduce zero-hours contracts, promote the Real Living Wage, and support pay increases linked to training and experience. Long-service recognition, mental health support, and peer networks will help staff feel valued and supported.



4. **Listening to staff voices**

Work to make sure care staff and others have a voice in how this strategy is delivered. This will include creating an engagement forum.



5. **Better use of technology**

With care becoming more complex, staff need the tools to do the job. Targeted work will be undertaken to invest in digital skills and look at how AI and tech can reduce admin and improve care.



6. **More and better training**

Too many staff have no formal qualifications, and many want to learn. Work will explore how to increase access to accredited training, support providers to offer high-quality in-house development, and boost apprenticeships to attract workers.



7. **Working together as one system**

Council and providers shouldn't compete for staff; they should work together. Shared training, joint recruitment, better data sharing, and open collaboration will help us grow and keep the best talent.

How this can happen

Change will not come just from good ideas, it needs commitment, funding, and practical action. So, three things will happen to bring this strategy to life:

- **Link workforce standards to contracts**

New contracts with providers will include clear expectations on pay, training, and career progression, so that good workforce practice becomes a requirement, not a nice-to-have.

- **Create a central workforce hub**

A shared recruitment and training hub will reduce duplication, improve access to development, and allow staff to move between roles more easily without leaving the sector. The hub's scope will be shaped with the sector, but early priorities include shared recruitment campaigns, coordinated training offers, workforce intelligence, and a platform for peer support. Its form whether virtual, physical, or hybrid will be co-designed to ensure relevance and buy-in. Funding, governance, and long-term sustainability will be addressed with partners as part of the hub's business case.

- **Work closely with providers and staff**

Regular workforce forums, better data, and open dialogue with care workers will make sure changes are grounded in real-world experience and owned by the whole sector. A new multi-agency Workforce Strategy Steering Group will oversee implementation of this strategy. It will bring together representatives from the Council, care providers, and partners to monitor progress, provide challenge, and ensure accountability. Task-and-finish groups will support delivery in key areas like training, recruitment, and workforce data, and all work will be co-produced with providers and staff.

A call to action

This strategy is a starting point, not a finish line. Halton has the potential to lead the way in building a care workforce that is proud, prepared, and properly supported.

That will take courage, consistency, and collaboration. But together, with shared ambition and a clear plan, it can shape a care system where people want to work, are proud to stay, and are empowered to care.

These ambitions must be underpinned by realistic funding models and aligned investment. Halton will explore all available levers, including commissioning reform, integrated care system (ICS) partnerships, and national funding streams to enable delivery.

Halton is also committed to transparency and shared learning and will explore all avenues including regular updates to the sector, shared progress reports, and potentially an annual workforce summit to reflect, celebrate, and re-align where needed.

Introduction

Adult social care in Halton plays a vital role in supporting vulnerable adults, including older people, individuals with disabilities, and those with other complex needs. The Borough of Halton is a unitary authority in the county of Cheshire. Since 2014, it has been one of six local authorities forming the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

This strategy has been developed to empower Halton's adult social care workforce while addressing both the opportunities and challenges it faces. It aligns with the broader vision for social care, which embraces a strengths-based approach, ensuring that individuals with care and support needs have greater control and choice over how they live their lives.

In recent years, financial pressures, increased life expectancy and the growth in numbers of people living with multiple and complex conditions has put a considerable strain on resources. This creates demand for a workforce that needs to be responsive to these changes and adapt what they do to respond to this changing environment.



A growing and ageing population, alongside increasingly complex health and care needs, means that demand for social care is rising. In response, the sector must not only attract more people into the workforce but also enable staff to work in innovative and flexible ways. It is essential to foster an environment where employees feel valued and supported, one that encourages career progression and retains experienced professionals within the system. Strong and effective leadership will be critical, and a clear leadership development plan must be in place to nurture and support future leaders.

Diversity and inclusion must also be central to workforce planning, ensuring that Halton improves its approach to the Workforce Race and Equality Standard while creating a workforce that is truly representative of the community it serves. An integrated approach, bringing together primary, community, and residential care services, will be vital in ensuring a seamless and responsive care system.

Recruiting and retaining staff with the right skills, in the right place, at the right time, remains one of the most significant challenges in a highly competitive national workforce market. This workforce strategy outlines key priorities designed to address these challenges while supporting the wider vision and values of social care in Halton.

Attracting new people into adult social care to replace those who have left is just one solution to keep pace with the demand for social care services. There is also a need to make sure everything possible is done to retain the existing workforce. This involves a range of approaches including effective recruitment, good learning and development opportunities and a focus on the health and wellbeing of our workforce.

The vision for the social care workforce in Halton is one of recognition, opportunity, and sustainability. It seeks to cultivate a workforce that feels truly valued, where individuals not only take pride in their roles but also receive the respect and appreciation they deserve.

By fostering an environment where career progression is both encouraged and supported, this vision aims to improve staff retention, ensuring that those who choose to work in social care see it not merely as a job, but as a fulfilling and long-term career path. Social care should be recognised as a rewarding and meaningful profession, one that allows individuals to grow and develop while making a tangible difference in people's lives.

Potential employees must also have a clear understanding of the personal qualities essential for success in the sector.



At the heart of this strategy is the commitment to safe and sustainable staffing, ensuring that services are delivered with consistency and excellence. Quality care depends on a well-supported and well-equipped workforce, and the ambition is to create the conditions that enable this.

There is also a strong belief that opportunities to enter the care sector should be accessible to all, particularly those facing economic disadvantage. By providing the necessary support and pathways for growth, more people can be encouraged to

build fulfilling careers in social care, strengthening both the workforce and the quality of care provided to residents.

With recruitment and retention issues impacting nationally on social care delivery, there is a need to ensure that there is a clear strategy going forward for all of adult social care in Halton. This strategy sets out to address the challenges facing the adult social care workforce, including financial constraints, an evolving provider market, and ongoing recruitment and retention difficulties.

A sustainable and responsive provider market is essential to supporting the most vulnerable residents in Halton. This strategy prioritises strong engagement with the workforce, ensuring that change is informed by the needs and experiences of those delivering care. A commitment to open dialogue and evidence-based decision-making will enable staff to play an active role in shaping and improving service delivery.

Halton has adopted an asset-based community development model, which focuses on empowering individuals and communities by identifying and harnessing local strengths. This approach encourages people to take an active role in their own health and well-being, promoting independence while building stronger, more resilient communities.

This asset-based approach will also contribute to the prevention agenda by ensuring that people have access to high-quality, timely information that enables informed decision-making about their care.

Community development has long been recognised as a key strand of health promotion, with strong evidence demonstrating its effectiveness in improving health outcomes and reducing inequalities. Strengthening communities through volunteering, peer support, partnerships, and access to community resources will contribute to a more person-centred approach to prevention.

This strategy sets out a clear and ambitious vision for Halton's adult social care workforce, ensuring that it remains resilient, adaptable, and equipped to meet the evolving needs of the community. Through investment in staff, leadership, and collaborative partnerships, the strategy will support the creation of a social care system that values its workforce, enhances career opportunities, and delivers high-quality, person-centred care.



The Halton landscape

3.1 Overview

Halton's adult social care system faces growing demand at the same time as its workforce is under increasing pressure. An ageing population and rising complexity are driving up care needs, while the current workforce profile; characterised by a high proportion of staff nearing retirement age, challenges in attracting younger people, and a reliance on less secure contracts suggests the system will struggle to keep pace without targeted and sustained interventions.

This is not simply a question of workforce numbers, but of workforce fit. The sector continues to face difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff, not because the roles themselves are unattractive, but because the overall offer; pay, progression, working conditions, and job security remains less competitive than in other sectors. Without a co-ordinated approach to strengthening the employment proposition, Halton risks falling further behind in an already challenging labour market.

At the same time, there are positive indicators to build upon. The borough's turnover rate is comparatively low, suggesting that staff do remain where there is a degree of security and support. The high proportion of unpaid carers suggests a local population with care experience that, with the right flexibility and encouragement, could form part of a broader recruitment pipeline. Halton's comparatively lower housing costs and low crime rate may also help position it as an attractive place to live and work, if promoted alongside a more compelling social care employment offer.

This is not a challenge that can be resolved overnight. But with shared commitment, strong local leadership, and clear direction, Halton can take meaningful steps to reshape the workforce landscape ensuring that adult social care remains responsive, resilient, and able to meet the needs of its residents in the years to come.

3.2 The 'as-is' position

Halton's current population is 128,577, with 51% male and 49% female. The number of residents aged 65 and over is rising more rapidly than any other age group and is projected to increase by 40% over the next 10 years. By 2040, this group is expected to make up 24% of Halton's total population. In contrast, the number of people aged 18 to 64 is projected to remain relatively stable, resulting in a more pronounced demographic shift toward an ageing population in Halton compared to the national trend.

Halton is one of the most deprived boroughs in England, ranking 39th out of 317 local authorities. Around 30% of its population lives in areas of high deprivation. Life expectancy varies significantly across the borough, with men in the most deprived areas living 11.7 years less than those in the least deprived areas, and women experiencing a 9.6-year gap.

Economically, Halton is a key industrial and logistics hub, with a higher-than-average proportion of residents employed in manufacturing (particularly chemicals and advanced manufacturing), wholesale and retail, and transport and storage.

Of Halton's 103,948 residents aged 16 and over, 60,121 (57.8%) are economically active (excluding full-time students). Among them, 95.3% are in employment, while 4.7% are unemployed

Halton's population is predicted to grow over the next 15 years. The percentage of residents over the age of 65 is also predicted to increase indicating an increase in demand for social care. Although this increase is in line with national predictions, Halton has a higher than national average rate of Alzheimer's diagnoses for people over 65 and the highest death rate from coronary heart disease in the UK. This indicates higher levels of complexity for social care compared to the UK average which was also reflected in the stakeholder interviews. This in turn links to increased demand, more clinical complexity and increased training needs. Halton also has less care home beds per 100,000 adults (809) compared to Warrington (1879) and St Helens (1390) which is a potential indication of more complex residents being cared for within their own homes.

Within Halton's current workforce 33% of staff are over 55 years old and only 9% of the workforce is under 30 years old. This poses a long-term risk to staffing stability and the loss of experience as 19% of the current workforce have over 21 years' experience in the sector. Mentoring and peer groups are methods in which this experience can be harnessed and passed on to younger and less experienced staff. Currently 78% of the workforce is female which is similar to the national average. Recruitment remains a persistent issue, particularly in attracting younger workers and male candidates. A more diverse, targeted approach, including apprenticeships, career outreach, and engagement with underrepresented workforce groups will be crucial to securing the adult social care sector's future across Halton.



The vacancy rate in Halton is 11.3% higher than the national average which is 8.3%. Closing this vacancy gap should be a priority as carrying high vacancies can lead to staff burnout and increased agency costs. The turnover rate is markedly less than the national average at 13.4% compared to 24.8%. This is encouraging but work needs to continue to sustain this rate into the future especially when looking to recruit from different areas of society and to decrease the vacancy gap.

Job stability is an issue within Adult Social Care nationally, and this is shown within Halton. In 2023 88% of staff were on a permanent contract, this decreased to only 70% in 2024. The number of staff on zero hours contracts is also higher than the national average. By increasing the number of permanent staff, job stability is increased, they are able to access more development opportunities, and the role becomes more appealing.

Offering qualifications can be attractive to potential recruits but also a way of retaining current staff by showing investment within the workforce and potential development opportunities. This can also be a key attraction strategy for the younger population to gain qualifications whilst working via apprenticeships. However, Halton had much fewer apprenticeship starts last year than neighbouring areas.

Alongside formal qualifications it was clear from the stakeholder engagement that training opportunities differed by provider. Some gaps were identified and mental health, trauma informed practice, enhanced clinical skills and digital capability were all seen as vital skills the workforce will need in the future. Expanding structured training pathways and incentivising upskilling will be essential to maintaining high-quality care standards.

'Pay and Conditions' was the category most selected for being the highest driver for staff leaving organisations in the survey. It was also the largest category when looking at the results from a weighted average perspective. Respondents of both the survey and interviews also mentioned pay in the 'other comments' section. During interviews it was discussed as something that could impact Adult Social Care in the future as it was felt that pay in the sector was not in line with the current cost of living.

Care workers employed by Halton Borough Council are paid on average £12.65 per hour, the national average. They are paid less than the other areas meaning that potential staff are attracted to jobs in neighbouring areas rather than Halton itself. Care workers in the independent sector are also paid less than the national average, £11.08 compared to £11.23. The rates for care workers in the independent sector are more competitive with the comparison areas, both Liverpool and Warrington pay less. Providers did mention in the interviews that they would require additional funding from Halton Borough Council to raise care worker wages.

During interviews some participants highlighted difficulties with recruitment due to the economic inactivity level of the population. The employment rate of the population aged 16-64 is less than the national average. There has also been an increase in the number of unpaid carers; this can be an advantage for recruitment as it means the majority of the population have care experience even at an unpaid level. It does however show a need for flexibility to help recruit and retain staff due to the amount of people with caring responsibilities.

Halton has lower crime rates than neighbouring areas, lower rents and more affordable housing, these could be seen as attractions for people in neighbouring areas if the vacancy gap cannot be filled by the Halton population alone. Overseas recruitment is also an option but can be costly and would need careful consideration especially around pastoral support in what is a less diverse population.

Halton faces a potential perfect storm: an ageing population, high care complexity, and a fragile workforce marked by an ageing profile, low pay, and gaps in training. The borough risks falling behind unless it acts decisively to make adult social care a more attractive, secure, and sustainable career.

This context underlines the urgent need for a coordinated, system-wide workforce strategy; one that addresses pay, training, job security, and career progression, while making the most of Halton's assets and values. Without that, the system will struggle to keep pace with rising need.

1) Call to action

This strategy is not just a set of recommendations; it is a commitment to the future of adult social care in Halton. The challenges facing the workforce are urgent and complex, but they are not insurmountable. With bold action, investment, and collaboration, Halton can build a workforce that is:

- Resilient, with the capacity to meet increasing demand.
- Skilled, equipped with the necessary training and development opportunities.
- Valued, recognised for its contribution to the well-being of the community.

To achieve decisive steps must be taken to:

- Implement structured career pathways that foster progression.
- Introduce financial incentives and improved working conditions to enhance retention.
- Embed minimum workforce standards into commissioning contracts, ensuring fair pay and secure employment.
- Foster a culture of respect, recognition, and professional growth.

Halton Borough Council will act as the lead agency in coordinating delivery of this strategy, ensuring alignment across commissioning, provider development, and system partnerships. However, the success of implementation depends on shared ownership across all organisations.

4.1 Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Build a career pathway and identify key roles

A structured, accessible career pathway is essential for the long-term sustainability of Halton's adult social care workforce. Clear progression routes support retention, incentivise training, and attract new staff.

A robust career pathway should encompass entry-level roles, intermediate positions, and senior leadership roles. Each stage should align (where possible) with an appropriate apprenticeship standard, enabling employers to maximise the apprenticeship levy and minimise training costs. Mapping these standards to key roles enables structured career pathways, guiding staff from entry-level to leadership. This approach ensures that Halton's workforce is equipped with the necessary practical experience and formal qualifications to deliver high-quality care.

To implement this effectively:

- Develop a Capability and Career Framework, endorsed by all adult social care providers in Halton, to ensure consistency in career pathways, skills development, and workforce expectations. This framework should clearly articulate key roles, required skills, and aligned qualifications.
- Enhance partnerships with local colleges, universities, and training providers to ensure accessible learning pathways.
- Provide employer-led guidance and mentoring programmes to support career progression.
- Create a visual roadmap illustrating clear career progression routes, helping both new and existing staff understand their development opportunities.



Recommendation 2. Expand recruitment & career awareness

To ensure a sustainable adult social care workforce in Halton, recruitment efforts must be proactive, inclusive, and strategic. This involves engaging underrepresented groups, enhancing awareness of career opportunities, and fostering industry partnerships. The ageing workforce also indicates that targeted recruitment is needed towards younger people. There is also a need to improve data collection on workforce demographics as data provided by Halton Borough Council showed that the ethnicity of 40.7% of staff was unknown. This data is useful to see how the workforce compares to the demographics of the local population but to also help with any target recruitment and to inform EDI initiatives and strategies.



Key recruitment initiatives:

- Pre-employment programmes designed to prepare individuals for roles in adult social care, equipping them with foundational skills and confidence before entering formal employment. (For example, an introduction to care course facilitated by local FE college to prepare people for roles in the care sector, with a guaranteed interview at the end of the course).
- Values-Based Recruitment, adopting values-based hiring practices to widen the candidate pool beyond those with prior experience. This means recruiting people for their compassion, reliability and commitment, then training them. A free tool has been developed by the University of York to build values-based interviews for care staff [Curious About Care](#).
- Targeted outreach campaigns in schools, colleges, job centres, and community organisations to highlight career prospects in adult social care.
- Targeted recruitment of NEETs by utilising different methods of advertising vacancies such as Instagram and TikTok, etc.
- Employer-led career talks and mentoring programmes, showcasing real career progression stories to inspire potential new employees.

Recommendation 3. Enhance pay & working conditions

Despite its vital role in supporting vulnerable adults, Halton's social care workforce can struggle with low pay, job insecurity, and poor working conditions, creating an environment for high vacancy and turnover rates.

By working with stakeholders to explore these approaches, the intention is not to impose additional unfunded requirements, but to highlight how improving pay, stability, and recognition can

have wider system benefits. Better retention and reduced turnover can lessen reliance on high-cost bank and agency cover, improve continuity of care, and reduce recruitment and induction costs. This makes such measures not only beneficial for staff and service users, but also potentially cost-neutral or even cost-saving over time.



Key workforce improvements:

- Promote a structured pay progression system, where salary increases align with experience, qualifications, and career progression milestones.
- Promote financial incentives for upskilling, such as incremental pay increases upon completion of qualifications.
- Recognise long service awards, providing reward and recognition initiatives for staff who remain in the sector for five years or more.
- Prioritise permanent contracts over zero-hours arrangements, ensuring job security for care workers.

- Advocate care providers pay the Real Living Wage for all care workers as a minimum.
- Explore options for helping social care staff to buy their own homes, despite house prices being more affordable in Halton than neighbouring areas as a higher proportion of the population socially rent.

Promote employer-led benefits and retention initiatives, such as:

- Mental health support services, counselling and wellbeing initiatives, to reduce stress and burnout.
- A peer-support network, allowing care workers to share experiences, provide mutual encouragement, and access mentoring opportunities.
- Recognition schemes, including professional accreditation and excellence awards, to celebrate contributions to the sector.

Recommendation 4. Engage the whole workforce in delivery

Ensure that implementation of strategy is done with and not to the social care workforce. It's about doing with people rather than doing to them. Explore ways staff (including those employed by providers) can engage and help inform implementation.

Key engagement improvements:

- Share workforce development priorities widely in a common language that will make sense to all staff in the sector.
- Have an 'easy read' version of this strategy.
- Explore what an employee engagement forum could look like and how it could include both provider staff and staff employed by Halton Borough Council.

This should be complemented by regular provider engagement, co-design sessions, and a shared governance structure, ensuring that implementation is not imposed 'top down' but shaped by the expertise and experience of the whole sector.



Recommendation 5. Increase use of technology

The use of technology is increasing within healthcare and will soon start to become more prevalent in social care especially with the need for more delegated healthcare tasks and the increasing clinical complexity of clients/service users. Some providers are already using technology to decrease administrative time spent on tasks such as recruitment, job planning and rostering.



Key to increasing the use of technology:

- Explore options for utilising e-rostering software across providers
- Understand the potential uses for Artificial Intelligence and whether it is being used in other areas
- Address digital training gaps and ensure staff are able to use technology effectively and adapt to higher levels of utilisation

Recommendation 6. Training

Data provided by Halton Borough Council stated that 43% of staff said they have no qualifications. Providing pathways to attaining qualifications can assist with recruitment of new staff and retainment of those already within the workforce.



- Look at options to provide staff with accredited training and access to qualifications whilst working.
- Explore options of working with providers and their in-house training provisions.
- Increase the number of apprenticeships to help attract younger people into a career in social care, Halton currently has significantly less apprenticeship starts than neighbouring areas.

Recommendation 7. Foster collaborative working

There is competition for staff between the health and social care sectors, there could be potential to work together on recruitment strategies to alleviate some of the competition and work towards mutual benefit. Another area of collaboration is with providers themselves.



Key approaches to collaborative working:

- Share learning from past workforce initiatives both from providers and Halton Borough Council
- Look at shared recruitment as a whole – not competing against each other in small areas.
- Consider how to improve data sharing from providers to Halton Borough Council especially around workforce metrics and staff surveys.
- Training costs, for certain qualifications or training; are there economies of scale by combining with providers.
- Establish a Joint Provider Workforce Forum to regularly review progress, share data and learning, and agree coordinated actions.
- Develop a shared workforce intelligence dashboard, co-produced with providers, to support planning and continuous improvement.

4.2 Addressing implementation challenges and enabling change

The challenge: A dispersed workforce in a commissioned system

The fundamental challenge in strengthening Halton's adult social care workforce is that while the commissioner sets strategic priorities, it does not directly employ the majority of the staff involved. Instead, the workforce is dispersed across a several private providers, each operating within their own financial and business constraints.

This model creates a disconnect between workforce ambitions and frontline reality, making it difficult to drive consistent change. A strong workforce strategy means little if providers lack the funds, incentives, or stability to invest in staff.

Several key barriers must be acknowledged:

- Limited direct influence on pay and conditions: The commissioner can recommend workforce improvements, but ultimately, it is private providers who set salaries, contracts, and training priorities.
- Inconsistent uptake of workforce initiatives: Some providers may embrace workforce development, but others, particularly those operating on thinner margins could struggle or deprioritise investment in their staff.
- Competitive pricing pressures: In a sector where contracts are often awarded based on cost, there is a risk that workforce investment becomes secondary to financial sustainability. This can result in a 'race to the bottom', where lower wages and less favourable working conditions drive high turnover and recruitment difficulties.

If these barriers are not addressed, the sector will continue to struggle with high vacancy rates, staff attrition, and an ongoing recruitment crisis. To overcome these challenges, a system-wide response is required one that aligns workforce development with the realities of a complex commissioning environment.

4.3 The solution: Strengthening workforce investment

To ensure meaningful and lasting change, the workforce strategy must be embedded not just in policy, but in the structural mechanisms of commissioning and funding. This means shifting from recommendations to enforceable commitments, incentivising good practice, and creating mechanisms that make workforce investment the norm rather than the exception. This can be achieved through a three-pronged approach.

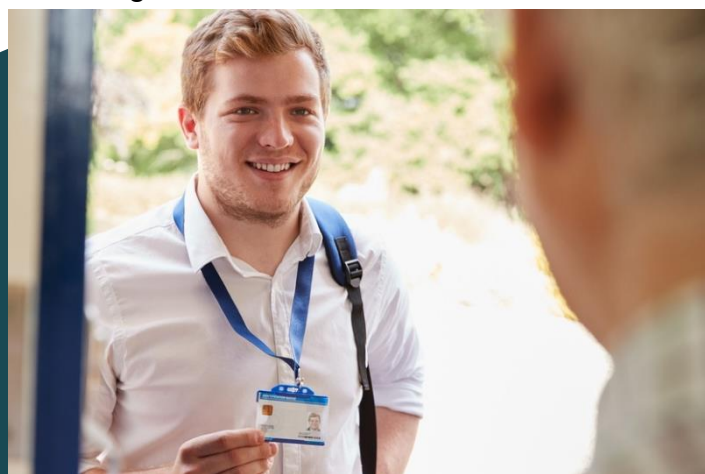
Prong A: Embedding workforce standards into commissioning contracts

Commissioning contracts are one of the most powerful tools available to drive sector-wide workforce improvements. By incorporating clear and enforceable workforce expectations, the commissioner can ensure that providers prioritise staff development as a core part of service delivery.

Key contractual mechanisms include:

- Minimum workforce standards: Contracts should specify baseline pay expectations, such as ensuring that all care workers receive at least the Real Living Wage.
- Career pathways as a contractual requirement: All providers should be required to offer structured career progression routes, aligned with recognised training and apprenticeship frameworks.
- Financial incentives for high-performing providers: A Quality Premium Payment could reward providers who meet workforce development and retention targets, ensuring that those investing in staff are recognised and supported.
- Blocking the 'race to the bottom': Introducing a minimum price floor in contract bidding would prevent providers from undercutting competitors at the expense of workforce conditions.
- The Council will also explore options for commissioning differently in future, including **block contracts**, **outcome-based payments**, and access to **pooled budgets or workforce funds** through the ICB, to support investment in staff pay, stability, and upskilling.

By integrating workforce sustainability into contractual obligations rather than optional best practice, Halton can create a level playing field; one where quality care and staff investment are not compromised by cost-cutting pressures.



Prong B: Establishing a centralised workforce development hub

One of the core challenges in a sector with a dispersed workforce is that each provider is responsible for its own recruitment, training, and workforce development, leading to duplication, inefficiencies, and gaps in provision. A centralised workforce hub, led by the commissioner, would provide a coordinated solution to these challenges.

Key functions of the Workforce Hub:

- A shared training and development programme: Instead of each provider arranging its own training, a single, coordinated programme would ensure that all care workers receive high-quality, consistent skills development.
- A rotational career pathway: Establishing a cross-provider career structure would allow care workers to move between different care settings (e.g., domiciliary care, residential care, specialist services) without leaving the sector.
- A joint recruitment platform: Instead of competing for staff, providers could access a shared recruitment pool, improving efficiency and sector-wide workforce stability.
- Pre-employment training initiatives: Creating introductory care training courses with guaranteed interviews upon completion would attract new entrants into the sector, providing a structured pathway into care work.

A centralised approach would reduce administrative burden on providers, improve workforce retention, and create a more attractive and professionalised sector.

In its initial phase, the hub will focus on:

- Coordinating a shared recruitment and careers campaign
- Delivering core training programmes and pre-employment pathways
- Providing consistent access to data and intelligence tools for providers
- Offering a platform for peer learning and best practice exchange

The design and scope of the hub will be **co-produced with providers**, with careful consideration given to the funding model, physical or virtual presence, and governance arrangements. This will ensure the hub meets real operational needs and secures provider buy-in from the outset.

The hub's form and scope, including whether it is a virtual network, a staffed service, or a physical space will be agreed through co-production with providers and stakeholders, taking account of available resources and existing assets.

Prong C: Engaging private providers in workforce reform

To ensure workforce improvements are both practical and achievable, private providers must be part of the conversation rather than having solutions imposed on them. A range of collaborative endeavours would enable the commissioner and providers to work together to co-design solutions.

This could include:

- Establishing a multi-agency Workforce Strategy Steering Group will be established. This group to include representatives from the local authority, care providers, voluntary sector, and workforce development partners with the aim of:
 - Holding oversight of the implementation plan and progress monitoring
 - Commissioning task-and-finish groups to lead specific workstreams (e.g., training, data, recruitment)
 - Reporting quarterly to Halton's Adult Social Care Executive Board on progress, risks, and mitigations
 - Promoting accountability, transparency, and shared ownership across the system
 - A clear terms of reference and reporting schedule will be developed to ensure governance remains effective and purposeful.
- Quarterly workforce planning forums: Bringing together commissioners, care providers, and workforce representatives to track progress, share best practices, and identify challenges.
- Local benchmarking workforce data: Publishing regular workforce reports to highlight trends in retention, training, and pay levels, creating positive peer pressure for improvement.
- Listening to the workforce: Establishing regular engagement sessions with frontline care workers to ensure that workforce policy reflects their experiences and needs.



4.4 In summary

Bringing this strategy to life will demand courage, consistency, and collaboration. While the dispersed nature of Halton's adult social care workforce presents structural challenges, it also offers an opportunity: to lead by example, innovate through partnership, and build a system that truly values its people. The actions outlined in this strategy are not aspirations; they are achievable, evidence-based interventions that require collective ownership.

The implementation plan will include regular updates to stakeholders and contributors, ensuring those who have shared their views and time can see the impact of their input. This may include:

- Publishing progress reports twice a year
- Hosting an annual 'state of the workforce' summit
- Sharing good practice and innovation stories from across the system.

By aligning commissioning, capability development, and shared values across the whole system, Halton can create a resilient, skilled, and respected workforce, ready not only to meet today's challenges, but to thrive in tomorrow's care landscape.





Developed by Skills for Health for
Halton Borough Council

skillsforhealth.org.uk



England and Wales charity no. 1143246 | Scotland charity no. SC045901

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 23rd October 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director, Adult Services

PORTFOLIO: Adult Social Care

SUBJECT: Annual Consultation Exercise – Fee Rates

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To inform the Board of the proposed fee setting process and annual uplift for domiciliary care, direct payments, supported living and care home providers within Halton for 2026/27.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board:

- 1) the Board note the contents of the report; and**
- 2) approval be given to actively enter into consultation with care providers in relation to the annual uplift for 2026/27.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Section 5 of the Care Act 2014 requires local authorities to ensure that the care market as a whole remains viable and sustainable. This covers all care sectors and providers of care which includes domiciliary care, supported living, residential and nursing providers. It also includes a growing sector of individual people who use services through personal budgets to employ a personal assistant.
- 3.2 When commissioning services, local authorities must have regard to the cost effectiveness and value for money that the services offer for public funds. However, they must not undertake any actions which may threaten the sustainability of the market and must ensure that remuneration for staff must be at least sufficient to comply with national minimum wage legislation, and that there is a 'fair price' paid for care.
- 3.3 The 2026/27 fee uplift is being considered at a time when the adult social care sector is facing major challenges. The Care Act requires Councils with responsibility for adult social care services to enable a sustainable market. This must also be considered in relation to value for money and affordability at a time when the Council is also facing significant financial pressures.
- 3.4 The approach to setting fees and agreeing to appropriate uplifts includes consulting with all stakeholders and reassuring them that arrangements for determining fees and uplifts are robust. The approach allows for uplifts to be

considered on an annual basis with consideration given to changes, business costs and the conditions faced by providers.

3.5 This position has recently been underlined by the High Court judicial review dispute between Stoke on Trent City Council and Staffordshire Association of Registered Care Providers (SARCP) whereby the dispute centred on a below inflation rise in the standard contract rate paid by the local authority to residential care home providers for 2024/25. The court found that the 1.4% increase was unlawful due to:

- Failing to consult adequately with SARCP
- Failure to take account of its duty to promote the efficient and effective operation of a market with a view to ensuring a variety of providers and high quality services (s.5(1) Care Act)
- Failure to take account of the importance of ensuring the market remained sustainable - e.g. by setting fees at a sustainable level (s.5(2)(d) Care Act)
- Failure to have regard to the importance of fostering continuous improvement in the quality of care services and the ability of providers to comply with CQC standards and improve quality given the pressures on overheads created by low fees (s.5(2)(e) Care Act)
- Failure to have regard to the importance of fostering a workforce able to deliver high quality care, including failing to have regard to how a 1.4% rise in fees could absorb a 9.8% rise in the National Living Wage where staff costs were typically around 70% of actual costs of care (s.5(2)(f) Care Act), and
- Failure to have regard to the importance of promoting the wellbeing of care home residents due to the 'indirect impact' on them of local authority fees not covering the provider's actual costs of care, inhibiting providers from meeting all their needs and/or leading them to increase the level of 'top-ups' for residents or their families (s.5(4) Care Act).

3.6 It is fundamental, in this context that the providers are given the opportunity to contribute to the fee setting process via consultation.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 None identified.

5.0 **OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The financial pressures within this sector are well recognised both nationally and locally. Although providers recognise the risks the Local Authority are facing and the impact of the cost of living crisis, the ongoing burden of staff vacancies and reliance on higher cost agency staff is severely affecting the sector.

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

6.1 **Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**

Consultation will help secure sustainable and diverse adult social care support

for people focusing on outcomes, wellbeing, quality, and choice, where service users will be safer and enjoy a better quality of life.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

Adult Social Care will work with providers to maximise employment opportunities within the local community.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

None identified.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

The consultation exercise will secure sustainable and diverse adult social care support for people focusing on outcomes, wellbeing, quality, and choice, where service users will be safer and enjoy a better quality of life.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

Adult Social Care will continue to work with providers to identify alternative approaches to support them with financial pressures e.g. training, procurement and alternative approaches to the delivery of care, including technology.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

None identified.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 The consultation will allow the sector to advise of any further risks in addition to those already identified.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 The current proposal would not impact upon any equality and diversity issues as all relevant protected characteristics would be unaffected by the proposal.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Adult Social Care will work continuously with providers to ensure services maximise the use of technology and exploit service innovations that support the Council's commitment for a greener environment.

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

10.1 'None under the meaning of the Act'.

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 23rd October 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director, Adults

PORTFOLIO: Health and Wellbeing

SUBJECT: Joint Health Scrutiny Arrangements – Cheshire & Merseyside: Stage 1 Delegation

WARD(S): Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The report is to introduce a proposal to delegate the Stage 1 consideration of substantiation variation to health services, where necessary, when Joint Health Scrutiny (JHS) arrangements may apply.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That

1) the report be noted; and

2) the Board endorses the proposal for Stage 1 delegation as outlined and recommends for onward approval by Council.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The proposed revised protocol was presented at the Health and Social Care Policy and Performance Board on 23rd September 2025. HSCPPB endorsed the protocol being adopted.
- 3.2 The protocol for establishment of JHS arrangements for Cheshire and Merseyside has been in place since 2014, with the latest review and update of the protocol being undertaken in 2024; presented and agreed at PPB in September 2024.
- 3.3 The statutory framework regarding health scrutiny authorises local authorities individually and collectively to:
- review and scrutinise any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of the health service; and,
 - consider consultations by a relevant NHS commissioning body or provider of NHS-funded services on any proposal for a substantial development or variation to the health service in the local authority's area.
- 3.4 In line with the protocol, prior to the establishment of any JHS arrangements, each local authority must first of all decide individually whether a proposal represents a substantial development/variation or not (**Stage 1**). The regulations then places a requirement on those local authorities that agree that a proposal is substantial to establish, in each instance, a joint overview and scrutiny committee for the purposes of

considering it. It is then only the statutory JHS committee which can formally comment on the proposals if more than one authority agrees that the proposed change is substantial.

- 3.5 There have been a number of instances over the past 12 months where NHS Cheshire and Merseyside have approached Local Authorities with proposals to change health services and we have been asked to consider these proposals via health scrutiny arrangements.

Not just an issue within Halton, but across a number of other Local Authorities across Cheshire & Merseyside, on a number of occasions the timing of these proposals and the timescales we have been asked to respond to haven't aligned with formal Board meetings.

- 3.6 This issue has been raised and discussed at the Cheshire and Merseyside Health Scrutiny Officers Group and each Local Authority has been asked to consider delegating Stage 1 of the process (as described in paragraph 3.3). For some, this may be to named Members, but in Halton's case it is suggested that it should be via the Lead Officer of the PPB in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the health scrutiny committee, when necessary.
- 3.7 There have been examples in the past where we have had to organise one off Special PPBs to consider whether changes were a substantial change/variation or not, to fit in with timings as outlined/required by health colleagues. Having a scheme of delegation in place would negate this need and only be initiated when timings do not allow for the proposals to be scheduled within the normal round of Board meetings.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The delegation arrangements are considered to be fit for purpose and will assist the Council in upholding the protocol.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

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

6.1 **Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**

The arrangements are considered to support the protocol and will therefore better assist in upholding the priority.

6.2 **Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy**

No specific implications.

6.3 **Supporting Children, Young People and Families**

No specific implications

6.4 **Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need**

No specific implications

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

No specific implications

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

No specific implications.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 There are no risks requiring control measures or a full risk assessment.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 There are no specific implications arising from the report.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no specific implications arising from the report.

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

10.1 There are none within the meaning of the Act.

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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