

Public Document Pack



Executive Board

Thursday, 16 April 2026 2.00 p.m.
The Boardroom, Municipal Building

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'A. J. Johnson'.

Chief Executive

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

PART 1

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1. MINUTES	1 - 10
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. LEADER'S PORTFOLIO	
(A) URGENT DECISIONS	11 - 12
4. CORPORATE SERVICES 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 Tuesday, 19 May 2026*

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8. SCHEDULE 12A OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985	
PART II	
<p>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.</p>	
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Item

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(A) CONTRACT FOR ADVOCACY SERVICE

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In accordance with the Health and Safety at Work Act the Council is required to notify those attending meetings of the fire evacuation procedures. A copy has previously been circulated to Members and instructions are located in all rooms within the Civic block.

EXECUTIVE BOARD

At a meeting of the Executive Board on Thursday, 12 March 2026 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: G. Cook, M. Reaney, E. Dawson, G. Ferguson, W. Rourke, L. Wilson-Lagan, A. Donaldson and D. O'Connor

Also in attendance: None

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

Action

At the commencement of the meeting the Leader asked the Board to stand for a minute's silence in honour of Councillor Valerie Hill who had sadly recently passed away.

EXB103 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2026, were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

CORPORATE SERVICES PORTFOLIO

EXB104 COUNCILWIDE SPENDING AS AT 31 JANUARY 2026

The Board received a report from the Director – Finance, advising of the Council's overall revenue net spending position as at 31 January 2026, together with a 2025/26 forecast outturn position.

Appendix 1 presented a summary of spending against the operational revenue budget up to 31 January 2026 and Appendix 2 provided detailed figures for each individual Department. Appendix 3 presented detail on the High Needs 2025/26 forecast outturn position and Appendix 4 set out the progress against agreed savings.

It was reported that in overall terms the outturn forecast for the year showed that net spend at 31 January 2026, was £1.236m below budget. The outturn forecast for the year estimated that net spending would be below budget by £1.273m based upon current assumptions. The position represented a significant improvement on forecasts from earlier in the year. It was noted that the 2025/26 budget was set using £29.385m of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS), therefore, it was essential for spending to remain below budget.

Consistent with those councils who had previously sought EFS, in order for Government to provide a final capitalisation direction, the Council was required to undergo an external assurance review which would include but would not be limited to, an assessment of the Council's financial position and governance arrangements. The Council had undertaken a proactive approach and in September 2025 commissioned the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (Cipfa) to undertake such a review of the Council's financial resilience and financial management arrangements. The review had been completed, and the Council was in the process of drawing up an action plan in line with the recommendations made.

It was noted that Council had approved the 2025/26 Capital Programme on 5 March 2025. Since then, the Programme had been revised to reflect a number of changes in spending profiles and funding as schemes had been developed. Appendix 5 brought all the separate elements together and report on the Council's total planned capital programme expenditure. The report set out those Capital schemes that had been revised.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) Executive Directors continue to implement the approved 2025/26 saving proposals as detailed in Appendix 4;
- 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) this 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;

Director of Finance

- 4) Council be asked to approve the revisions to the capital programme set-out in paragraph 3.31 and incorporated within Appendix 5; and
- 5) the forecast position for High Needs funded pupil costs set-out in Para 3.18 to 3.24 and Appendix 3, be noted.

EXB105 REVIEW OF COUNCILWIDE FEES AND CHARGES - MARKETS

At a previous meeting of the Board held on 12 February 2026, the councilwide fees and charges for 2026/27 were approved. At that time the proposed charges relating to the Markets were not available, details of these were now included in the Appendix to the report.

RESOLVED: That the proposed fees and charges for 2026/27 relating to the Markets as set out in the Appendix, be approved.

Director of Finance

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

N.B. Councillor Dennett declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the following item of business as he is Chair of Governors at Gorsewood Primary School.

EXB106 HIGH NEEDS PROVISION CAPITAL ALLOCATION – PROPOSED EXPANSION OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS & DISABILITY PROVISION - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director – Children’s Services, that sought approval for the proposals for the continued expansion of special educational needs and disability provision in Halton’s schools.

The Board noted that in March 2025 the Council received notification from the Department of Education that it would be allocated a further £1.2m in High Needs Provision capital funding to support the provision of new places and/or to expand existing provision for pupils and students with high needs at Local Authority maintained and academy schools. In the autumn term 2025, officers wrote to all schools to seek expressions of interest in offering new or additional SEND provision at their school. Subsequently eighteen expressions of interest were received. Of these fourteen were identified for progression and details of these were set out in Appendix A.

Reason(s) for Decision

The Council was required to demonstrate appropriate identification of need against spend from the High Needs Capital Allocation Grant.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

Implementation Date

It was intended that the first phase of additional provision could be offered from September 2026 and the remainder by September 2027.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) approves the commencement of the statutory consultation process for those schools where the Local Authority (LA) is designated as the 'Decision Maker' (Detailed in Appendix A), with regard to the implementation of new SEND provision;
- 2) approves the progression of projects and capital expenditure for any school (LA maintained or Academy) where a statutory consultation is not required (detailed in Appendix A);
- 3) approves the allocation of funding for capital expenditure incurred at those Academy schools detailed in Appendix A providing those schools undertake their own statutory consultation if required; and
- 4) receives a further report detailing the outcome of any Local Authority led statutory consultations (providing the Board agree at this meeting to commence with those consultations).

Executive Director
of Children's
Services

EXB107 FOSTERING AND SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP CARERS
UPLIFT PAYMENT

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director - Children's Services, which advised on an uplift in payments to fostering and Special Guardianship Order (SGO) households in Halton to support foster carers/SGO carers/Staying Put who were providing care and support to the children of Halton who are placed with these carers. The request is for:

- for all foster carers, Staying Put and SGO carers to

be provided with an uplift of 2% for the 2024-2025 financial year. Payments would be backdated to April 2024 to cover the costs of raising an extra child in their home;

- for the year 2025/26 for all foster carers, staying put carers and SGO carers to be uplifted by 2.5% for the financial year;
- all foster carers, SGO carers and Staying Put carers would receive an uplift of 2.5% for 26/27;
- as part of the Council offer to recruit and maintain foster carers locally the Council have paid Council Tax for their carers once a child had been placed in their care. It was requested that this arrangement continued and approved Halton Foster Carers would continue to receive 100% council tax exemption at a cost of approximately £2000 per household per year. Based on 100 households this would require £200,000 per year additional funding. The current allowance was being reviewed to include stipulations on households only receiving tax relief once approved and children were in placement but where households were not taking children then council tax relief would cease; and
- the current monthly mobile phone allowance would be maintained and payable to all approved Halton Fostering households. This was currently set at £15 per month.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) all Halton Council approved foster carers, staying put carers and SGO carers are provided with an uplift of 2% to be backdated to 1 April 2024 until 31 March 2025 and for the 2.5% uplift to be applied from 1 April 2025 until 31 March 2026; and
- 2) approval is given to a further increase of 2.5% next year 2026/27.

ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL PORTFOLIO

EXB108 NORTH WIDNES (EAST - WEST) ACTIVE TRAVEL LINK

The Board considered a report of the Director - Environment and Regeneration, that sought a waiver in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 iv of part 3 of Procurement Standing Orders for the direct award of design work for active travel links (routes 40 and 36 – Lunts Heath Road, Derby Road and Cronton Lane), to Flinders Chase Consultants to the value of £120,000.

Executive Director
of Children's
Services

Flinders Chase Consultants had undertaken design and consultation work within Widnes previously, therefore had collated a significant amount of data and were familiar with the issues and opportunities in this locality for active travel.

Following a discussion around the proposed design work, it was suggested that elements of the scheme relating to Birchfield Road particularly near to the station, would require careful consideration and would need to be reflected in any emerging design options.

RESOLVED: That a waiver in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 iv of part 3 of Procurement Standing Orders is agreed, for the direct award of design work for active travel links to Flinders Chase Consultants to undertake design work for a scheme of active travel links along Routes 36 and 40 (Lunts Heath Road, Derby Road and Cronton Lane).

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY PORTFOLIO

N.B. Councillor Wall declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the following item of business as she owns two rental properties in the proposed Licensed Zone area.

EXB109 PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR - PROPOSAL TO INTRODUCE SELECTIVE LICENSING IN 6 AREAS - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Director of Public Health, which sought approval to commence the statutory consultation process on the proposal to introduce selective licensing of private rental properties in 6 areas of the borough. It was noted that the Safer and Housing Policy and Performance Board had endorsed the proposal at their meeting on 9 March 2026.

Reason(s) for Decision

The scheme was required to ensure property standards in the private rental sector were improved and maintained to provide safe and healthy homes for residents. The scheme also sought to prevent housing conditions being a source of health inequalities.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

The current regulatory regime for housing standards is reactive and relies on tenants reporting concerns about

housing standards to the council. The Governments Renters Rights bill and the subsequent Renters Rights Act 2025 provided some measures to improve tenants rights, such as the removal of no fault evictions, however the onus was still on tenants to report concerns about property conditions. The government have recently published an implementation timetable for other measures within the renters rights bill and have indicated that measures to improve property conditions through a decent homes standards would not come into force until 2035 at the earliest. Selective Licensing was therefore the only option available to the council to proactively ensure that private rental property met the required standards.

Implementation Date

Pending approval by Council it was proposed to introduce the selective licensing scheme in April 2027.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) approve commencement of the statutory consultation on the proposal to introduce a selective licensing scheme for private rental properties in the borough; and
- 2) delegate authority to determine appropriate license conditions to the Director of Public Health and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Environmental Sustainability.

Director of Public Health

ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL/HOUSING AND SUSTAINABILITY PORTFOLIOS

EXB110 DEVELOPING A BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN PROGRAMME FOR HALTON

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director – Environment and Regeneration, which sought views on the development of a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Programme, including the allocation of proposed sites. BNG was a mandatory approach to development in England, that required a minimum 10% increase in habitat quality or quantity compared to the state of the site before a development could take place.

The report sought approval to appoint a BNG Responsible Body and to undertake further financial modelling work to ascertain potential income that could be generated on designated sites.

RESOLVED: That

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

- 1) approval is given to enable the sites presented in the report (Appendix 1) to be designated for biodiversity enhancement and restoration;
- 2) subject to further work, the Board agrees that the sites mentioned would be protected for at least 30 years, as set out in the Environment Act 2021;
- 3) the Executive Director Environment and Regeneration in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Environment and Urban Renewal and Housing and Sustainability, be authorised to appoint a BNG Responsible Body in order to progress five pilot sites as identified in section 3.10 of the report;
- 4) the Executive Director Environment and Regeneration and Director of Finance in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Environment and Urban Renewal, Housing and Environmental Sustainability and Resources, be authorised to undertake further exploratory work to model potential income streams and to identify up front expenditure required to achieve this; and
- 5) Members views on the financial options in section 5.5 were noted.

EXB111 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.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE PORTFOLIO

EXB112 CARE PROVIDER CONTRACT UPLIFT 2026/27 - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Interim Director of Adult Social Services, which advised on the outcome of the consultation with domiciliary care, direct payments, supported living and care home providers within Halton, in respect of the Care Provider Contract Uplift for 2026/27.

Reason(s) for Decision

Section 5 of the Care Act 2014 requires local authorities to ensure that the care market as a whole remains viable and sustainable, any uplift is essential to support this market.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not offering an uplift for the care market would jeopardise market sustainability and potentially see providers leaving the Borough.

Ceasing delivery of the services would impact negatively on a vulnerable cohort of the borough's population and likely result in more costly, crisis intervention being.

Implementation Date

1st April 2026.

RESOLVED: That the Board:

- 1) note the contents of the report;
- 2) considers the recommendations and risks; and

Interim Director of
Adult Social
Services

- 3) approval to be given to offer the recommended uplift to care providers for 2026/27.

EXB113 REVIEW OF TELEHEALTHCARE SERVICES

The Board considered a report which set out a number of options following a review of the Telehealthcare Services in Halton.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) an implementation plan be developed to include focussed work on maximising individual's benefits prior to introducing the revised charging policy; and
- 2) an update report be brought back to the June meeting of the Board.

Interim Director of
Adult Social
Services

MINUTES ISSUED: 18 March 2026.

CALL-IN: 25 March 2026 at 5.00 pm.

Any matter decided by the Executive Board may be called in no later than 5.00pm on 25 March 2026.

Meeting ended at 2.35 p.m.

REPORT TO: Executive Board
DATE: 16 April 2026
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
17 March 2026	Crisis and Resilience Fund – 2026/27 Scheme and Spending Plan for Qtr1

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: 16 April 2026

REPORTING OFFICER: Director – Legal and Democratic Services

PORTFOLIO: Corporate Services

SUBJECT: Annual Review of Constitution 2026

WARDS: Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to ask the Board to seek the approval of the Council to a number of changes to the Constitution.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Executive Board recommends Council to approve the changes to the Constitution including the matters set out in Appendix 1.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 The revised version of the Constitution picks up the changes to the Council's working arrangements that have taken place during the year, as well as other changes which are intended to assist the Council to operate more effectively.

3.2 The proposals for change have been considered by the Chief Executive and the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services in accordance with Article 16.02. Apart from the purely technical changes, the proposed amendments that are considered to be of particular significance are listed in Appendix A to this report.

4.0 POLICY, FINANCIAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

4.1 All legislative changes have been considered. However, no further amendments, over and above those already outlined, are required at the present time. Any other required changes during the period 2026/27 will be the subject of further reports when dates and details are available.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

The changes proposed are designed to support the continued delivery of the Council's priorities.

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 6.1 The Council needs to ensure that its Constitution is regularly updated so that it continues to support efficient, transparent and accountable decision-making by the authority.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 7.1 None.

8.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no implications.

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

None under the meaning of the Act.

Appendix 1

Proposed Significant Changes to the Constitution

Finance Standing Orders

Para 4.1.2 The Director - Finance shall prepare each year a Financial Strategy covering a period of up to **five** years, which shall include forecasts of both spending needs and available resources. **(increased from three years)**

Para 5.2.1 (final paragraph) - The Director - Finance shall monitor the Council's overall budget and report thereon **regularly** to the Executive Board. **(replacing quarterly reporting)**

Para 5.2.2.3 - When potential overspends ~~impacting on current and future year budgets cannot be virement is not allowed~~ **are driven by new service responsibilities or excessive service demand increases**, an application for a contribution from the contingency budget may be necessary. **(amended wording)**

Para 6.4.2 – Add **Head of Procurement** to the certification list for cheques bank transfer etc. **Also, change job title of 'Head of Audit, Procurement and Operational Finance' to 'Head of Audit and Operational Finance'. The job title changes need making throughout the document.**

Para 6.4.3 - All cheque stationery shall be ordered and controlled by the Director - Finance who shall make proper arrangements for its safe custody. – **DELETE as cheque stationery is no longer ordered.**

Para 9.1.2 - To be added - **With regard to services provided by the MOT, Service and Repair Centre, authority to approve annually the fees and charges for these services is delegated to the Director of Planning and Transportation, in consultation with the relevant Executive Board Portfolio Holder.**

In section 6.4.2 include the Head of Procurement as an additional bank signatory.

6.2 INTERNAL AUDIT

6.2.1 Internal Audit Charter

- (a) Section 151 of the Local Government Finance Act requires that 'every local authority shall make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs and shall secure that one of their officers has responsibility for the administration of those affairs'. The Council has designated this statutory responsibility to the Director - Finance. As such, the Director- Finance is the statutory officer responsible for

ensuring that the Council’s internal audit arrangements conform to the ~~Public Sector Internal Audit Standards~~ **Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector**, which represent mandatory proper practice for internal audit in local government. **(replacing Public Sector Internal Audit Standards with Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector)**

- (b) ~~The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards~~ **The Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector** require that the purpose, authority and responsibility of the internal audit activity are formally defined in an internal audit charter. The provisions contained within Section 6.2 of Finance Standing Orders shall therefore constitute the Council’s Internal Audit Charter. **(replacing Public Sector Internal Audit Standards with Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector)**

6.2.2 Definitions

~~The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards~~ **The Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector** require that the following terms be defined in respect of the internal audit function: **(replacing Public Sector Internal Audit Standards with Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector)**

Chief Audit Executive:	The Head of Audit, Procurement & Operational Finance. The Head of Audit and Operational Finance (change job title of ‘Head of Audit, Procurement and Operational Finance’ to ‘Head of Audit and Operational Finance’)
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6.2.4 Core Principles for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing

~~The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards outline ten core principles for the provision of an effective internal audit:~~

- ~~- Demonstrates integrity~~
- ~~- Demonstrates competence and due professional care~~
- ~~- Is objective and free from undue influence (independent)~~
- ~~- Aligns with the strategies, objectives and risks of the organisation~~ ~~- Is appropriately positioned and adequately resourced~~
- ~~- Demonstrates quality and continuous improvement~~
- ~~- Communicates effectively~~
- ~~- Provides risk-based assurance~~
- ~~- Is insightful, proactive and future-focused~~

~~Promotes organisational improvement~~

Replace all the above with:-

The Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector outline 15 core principles for the provision of an effective internal audit:

- Demonstrate Integrity
- Maintain Objectivity
- Demonstrate Competency
- Exercise Due Professional Care
- Maintain Confidentiality
- Authorised by the Board
- Positioned Independently
- Overseen by the Board
- Plan Strategically
- Manage Resources
- Communicate Effectively
- Enhance Quality
- Plan Engagements Effectively
- Conduct Engagement Work
- Communicate Engagement Results and Monitor Action Plans

6.2.5 Professionalism and Ethics

- (a) Internal audit activity is governed by adherence to the ~~Public Sector Internal Audit Standards~~ **Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector**. This guidance constitutes principles of fundamental requirements for the professional practice of internal auditing and for the evaluating the effectiveness of internal audit activity. **(replacing Public Sector Internal Audit Standards with Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector)**
- (b) The Chief Audit Executive is responsible for managing the internal audit activity in accordance with the internal audit charter, ~~and the Definition of Internal Auditing the Code of Ethics and the Standards~~. The Chief Audit Executive must hold a professional qualification (CMIIA, CCAB or equivalent) and be suitably experienced. **(Deleted 'and' and 'the Code of Ethics')**
- (c) ~~The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards~~ **The Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector** contain ~~a Code of Ethics~~ **standards of ethics and professionalism**, which are mandatory for all persons involved in internal audit activity in the public sector. **(replacing Public Sector**

Internal Audit Standards with Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector and amended wording)

6.2.10 Reporting

- (a) The findings and agreed action plans from each internal audit engagement shall be reported to the:
- Appropriate service manager(s)
 - Appropriate Executive Director, Director and Head of Service
 - Director – Finance
 - Chief Executive
 - **Portfolio Holder – Corporate Services**
 - External Audit

(Added bullet point - Portfolio Holder – Corporate Services)

6.2.11 Quality Assurance & Improvement Programme

- (a) ~~The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards~~ **The Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector** require a Quality Assurance & Improvement Programme (QAIP) to be developed and maintained that covers all aspects of internal audit activity. (replacing **Public Sector Internal Audit Standards with Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector**)
- (b) The Chief Audit Executive is responsible for ensuring that the QAIP conforms to the requirements of the ~~Public Sector Internal Audit Standards~~ **Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector** and provides reasonable assurance to key stakeholders that Internal Audit: (replacing **Public Sector Internal Audit Standards with Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector**)

Para 4.1.2 The Director - Finance shall prepare each year a Financial Strategy covering a period of up to **five** years, which shall include forecasts of both spending needs and available resources. (increased from **three years**)

Para 5.2.1 (final paragraph) - The Director - Finance shall monitor the Council's overall budget and report thereon **regularly** to the Executive Board. (replacing **quarterly reporting**)

Para 5.2.2.3 - When potential overspends ~~impacting on current and future year budgets cannot be virement is not allowed~~ **are driven by new service**

responsibilities or excessive service demand increases, an application for a contribution from the contingency budget may be necessary. (amended wording)

Para 6.4.2 – Add **Head of Procurement** to the certification list for cheques bank transfer etc. Also, change job title of 'Head of Audit, Procurement and Operational Finance' to 'Head of Audit and Operational Finance'. The job title changes need making throughout the document.

Para 6.4.3 - All cheque stationery shall be ordered and controlled by the Director - Finance who shall make proper arrangements for its safe custody. – **DELETE as cheque stationery is no longer ordered.**

Procurement Standing Orders

Page 109 - Para 1.9.2 Acceptance of tender by **Operational Director** - change job title of **Operational Director** to Director. The job title changes need making throughout the document

Page 113 - Para 1.2.4 Officers must consult with the **Head of Audit, Procurement and Operational Finance** - change job title of 'Head of Audit, Procurement and Operational Finance' to 'Head of Procurement. The job title changes need making throughout the document.

Page 118 - Para 1.5.5 – Direct Award – In Special Cases
The contracting authority notifies the market that it intends to award a contract without running a competitive procedure in compliance with the procurement legislation.

Direct Award justifications include:

- (i) the contract is for production of a prototype or otherwise novel goods/services
- (ii) only a single supplier can supply the requirement
- (iii) the procurement is for additional/repeated goods, services or works
- (iv) the contract is for a commodity (e.g. raw materials where tendering in the usual way would not be appropriate)

The contracting authority must publish a Transparency Notice in compliance with procurement legislation before confirming the intention to directly award a contract.

Replace red text above with the text below which provides the list of justifications as set out in Schedule 5 of the PPA23 procurement legislation.

Direct Award justifications include:

- (v) Prototypes and development: the contract is for production of a prototype or otherwise novel goods or services that is designed or developed at the request of the Council.

- (vi) Single suppliers – there are three direct award justifications under this heading:
 - (a) artworks: the contract concerns the creation or acquisition of a unique work of art or artistic performance;
 - (b) exclusivity: a particular supplier is in possession of intellectual property or other exclusive rights and there are no reasonable alternatives, which means only the supplier with those rights can deliver the goods, services or works.
 - (c) technical exclusivity: due to an absence of competition for technical reasons, and provided there are no reasonable alternatives, only a particular supplier can supply the goods, services or works required.
- (vii) additional or repeat goods, services or works: There are two direct award justifications under this heading:-
 - (a) the contract concerns the purchase of additional or partial replacement of existing goods, services or works, which are the same or compatible with existing provision.
 - (b) the contract has previously been awarded under a competitive tendering procedure and the tender documents or tender notice set out that the intention was to carry out a subsequent procurement of similar goods, services or works by direct award. The direct award must be made within 5 years of the original contract being awarded.
- (viii) commodity markets: the contract concerns goods purchased on a commodity market
- (ix) Advantageous terms on insolvency: the award of the public contract to a particular supplier will ensure terms particularly advantageous to the contracting authority due to the fact that a supplier (whether or not the one to which the contract is to be awarded) is undergoing insolvency proceedings.
- (x) Urgency: the contract cannot be awarded on the basis of a competitive tendering procedure because the goods, services or works are strictly necessary for reasons of extreme and unavoidable urgency.
- (xi) User choice preference: the contract is for the supply of user choice services where the individual to whom the services are to be supplied (or their carer) have expressed a preference as to who should supply the services, and the Council considers

that it is not in the best interests of individual to award the contract under a competitive procedure.

The contracting authority must publish a Transparency Notice in compliance with procurement legislation before confirming the intention to directly award a contract, except where the contract is for user choice services.

Page 120 - Para 1.8.2 (iii) All panel members and individuals/teams relevant to the procurement of the contract, must sign and date a conflict-of-interest declaration form prior to participating in the procurement process **and at relevant stages throughout the procurement of the contract**. Include new text in green in compliance with the PPA23 procurement legislation requirements for contracting authorities to seek a conflict-of-interest declaration throughout the whole lifecycle of a procurement process.

Page 120 - **New** Para 1.8.2 (iv) **The Head of Procurement will regularly review and revise the conflict assessment throughout the procurement process. After the contract is entered into responsibility for maintaining the conflict assessment will transfer to the client department who will review and revise through to the end of the contract including any pre-determined extension periods**. Include new text in green in compliance with the PPA23 procurement legislation requirements for contracting authorities to maintain a conflict-of-interest assessment throughout the whole lifecycle of a procurement process and after the award of the contract until such a time that the contract expires.

Page 124 – Para 1.11.4 **Signed Contracts**

Contracts with a value not exceeding £1M shall be signed in accordance with Finance Standing Order 3.4.1. Contracts with a value exceeding £1M shall be signed in accordance with the requirements of Article **15.04** of the Council's Constitution. Such contracts must either be signed by an Officer of the Authority at Director level, together with another Officer of the Authority nominated by the said Director, or made under the common seal of the Council attested by the Director (Legal and Democratic Services) or his/her nominee. Replace **15.04** with 13.04

Page 124 – Para 1.11.5 **Common Seal of the Council**

The Common Seal will be affixed to those documents which in the opinion of the Director (Legal and Democratic Services) should be sealed in accordance with the requirements of Article **15.05** of the Council's Constitution. Replace **15.05** with 13.05

Compliant Procurement Routes

Page 131 PPA23 and PCR24 should read are not retrospective and not **retroactive**.

Page 131 Procurement Legislation Value Thresholds **2024/25*** replace with 2026/27.

Page 131 Supplies and Services exclusive of VAT 179,086 replace with 173,100

Page 131 Supplies and Services inclusive of VAT 214,904 replace with 207,720

Page 131 Works exclusive of VAT 4,477,174 replace with 4,327,500

Page 131 Works inclusive of VAT 5,372,609 replace with 5,193,000

Procurement Procedures Table

Page 132 - Up to £25,000 – standing order 3.3 replace with 3.4

Page 132 - £25,000 up to value threshold – standing order 3.2 replace with 3.3

Standing Orders Relating to Duties of Proper Officers and Delegation to Officers

Some minor updates to reflect changes in legislation; areas affected include a number of licenses and numerous new Acts.

List of changes identified & agreed 2026/27

Item ref	Topic	Working Group Lead Officer	Changes required/location in document	Action
1	Senior Management Structure page 233 Duties of Proper Officers Page 283	Andrew Plant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on Page 233 can Director of Policy, Planning and Transportation be changed to Director Planning and Transport • On standing orders in the list DPPT - Director of Policy, Planning and Transportation be changed to DPT - Director Planning and Transport • All D-PPT references to D-PT • Power 151 add D-PT and delete "(2)" from 151 • Add power for D-PT for Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 ('ABCPA 2014') Community Protection Warnings and Notice (CPW) & (CPN) • Add D-PT to power 163 • Add power for D-PT to take action Obstructing the highway under 149 and s143 of the Highways Act 1980 ('HA 1980'). Unless this is caught by power 133 	
2	Duties of Proper Officers Page 283	Tim Gibbs	<p>Amend delegation 123 (page 306) to read as follows:</p> <p>123. To exercise the powers and duties of the Council under Part I (permanent traffic regulation orders), Part II (temporary prohibition or restriction of traffic on roads, including prohibition or restriction in connection with certain special events), and Part VI (speed limits) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act</p>	

			<p>1984 and Section 21 of the Town Police Clauses Act 1847 (power to make orders for preventing obstructions in the streets during public processions, etc.).</p> <p>Also, extend delegation 139 to include new Acts:</p> <p>139 To exercise all the Council's powers and functions under Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and to appoint authorised officers under Section 108 of the Environment Act 1995 to enter premises and to exercise the powers contained in Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 relating to contaminated land. To exercise all the Council's powers and functions under the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025, the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, the Environment Act 2021, the Housing and Planning Act 2016.</p>	
3	Regulatory Committee Table 1	Stephen Burrows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Page 281 and 282 A number of licenses within table 1 are now granted by officers under delegated powers (see page 327) and not the regulatory committee. <p>These licenses include</p> <p>Animal Boarding Establishments Animal Welfare Dangerous Wild Animals Dog Breeding Dog Boarding Pet Shops Performing animals Riding Establishments Zoos</p>	

	<p>Duties of Proper Officers Page 283</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Page 299 Paragraph 76 - Part VI and IX of the Housing Act 1985 – these powers have largely been superseded by Housing Act 2004. So this can be deleted. • Page 299 onwards - A new provision relating to Renters Rights Act 2025 needs to be added to the matters related to Housing section (could replace para 83 if 79 and 83 are consolidated see below) <p>Suggested wording.</p> <p>To Authorise officers to exercise the Enforcement and Investigatory powers provided by the Renters Rights Act 2025. D of PH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Page 300 – Para 77 – think should be removed and consolidated with 82 (see below) • Page 300 – Para 79 is restrictive as drafted – and I think could be consolidated with 83 to read To exercise the councils powers under Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004 in relation to Housing Conditions D of PH <p>(suggest removal of “in-conjunction with D-LD” because we don’t routinely consult legal on notices and would hinder emergency action)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Page 300 Suggest para 82 is expanded to accommodate selective licensing – and reads To exercise the powers of the council under Part 2 and Part 3 of the Housing Act 2004 in relation to Licensing of HMO’s and Selective Licensing of 	
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			<p>other residential property.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are currently no provisions within the “Matters relating to Housing” section to deal with empty homes. <p>Suggest a new para is added</p> <p>To exercise the powers of the council in relation to Part 4 of the Housing Act 2004 in relation to additional control provisions for residential property.</p> <p>(It is yet to be determined where this function sits – there is a proposal within housing strategy to use developer contributions (section 106) to fund – suggest power delegated to DPPT, D-LD and DoPH)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Page 325 onwards The Renters Rights Act 2025 should be also be added to Part 1 and Part 2 of Appendix A • Page 325 onwards the Smoke and Carbon Monoxide (England) Regulations should be added to Part 2 of Appendix a • Page 325 onwards the The Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015 should be added to Part 1 and Part 2 of appendix a • Page 325 onwards – the Environmental Protection (Single Use Vapes) (England) Regulations 2024 needs to be added to Part 1 of 	
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			<p>Appendix A</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Page 325 - the reference to “Competition and Consumer Act 2024” needs correcting to the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumer Act 2024 	
4	Duties of Proper Officers Page 283	Liz Wilson Lagan	<p>Add definition HoLS Head of Leisure Services</p> <p>Page 285 - Schedule 29 para. 41 Exercise of functions under Section 9 (1) and (2), 13 (2) (h) and 3 (b) and 20 (b) of the Registration Services Act 1953. – amend the Proper Officer from ED-ER to D-CG/ HoLS</p> <p>Delete the following:-</p> <p>Section 13 Registration Service Act 1953 Discharging the functions of the proper officer with regards to the local organisation of the registrars’ service. D-CG</p> <p>And insert:-</p> <p>Registration Service Act 1953 Discharging the powers and duties of the Proper Officer for the purposes of the Registration Service Act 1953, the Marriage Act 1949 and the Marriages and Civil Partnership (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005. D-CG/HoLS</p>	

			<p>Page 292 Add wording in bold below:-</p> <p>19. To authorise, institute, defend, conduct and appear in on behalf of the Council any legal proceedings (whether criminal or civil), or authorise others to do so, and to take all other action necessary to protect and/or further the Council's interests. D-LD</p> <p>Page 295 Add the wording in bold below:-</p> <p>37. To take all necessary steps relating to the demand, collection and recovery of business rates, the business improvement district levy and Council Tax and to issue all necessary notices and statements and to sign any documents and to institute, conduct and appear in civil and criminal proceedings in the Magistrates' Court on behalf of the council as the business rates and Council Tax billing authority. D-F</p> <p>Insert a new delegation (after the above delegation 37)</p> <p>38. To authorise officers under section 223 of the Local Government Act 1972 to conduct proceedings (whether criminal and civil) and appear in the Magistrates' Court on behalf of the council as business rates and Council Tax billing authority. D-F</p>	
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			<p>New delegation (suggest this is added to the section headed "Matters related to Council Policy"):-</p> <p>To appoint one or more Deputy Electoral Registration Officers and to revoke or vary such appointments as necessary – ERO</p> <p>Add new definition on page 283 ERO – Electoral Registration Officer</p>	
5		Wesley Rourke	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Page 27 refers to a Director of Housing – we don't have one. 2. Page 134 should read Standing Orders not Anding Orders. 3. Page 137 this has been under the Resources Portfolio, but in practice the Deputy Leader is consulted, too. I suggest this is added. 4. Page 200 (g) this will need to be amended if a new scrutiny policy is implemented. 5. Page 233 will need changing e.g. Nicki Goodwin needs adding (replacing Paul Wright). 6. Page 246 appendix 2 – could we consider occasions when confidential data is provided by government departments e.g. Home Office information to officers as not for wider circulation but may require an input from the portfolio holder. How do we deal with this in our protocols? 	
6	Senior Management Structure	Debbie O'Connor	<p>Pg 234 – Exec Director ASC – Zoe Fearon Interim DASS – Debbie O'Connor</p> <p>Director of Commissioning – Sarah Foy</p>	

			Director of Care Management – Debbie O'Connor	
7	Health and Wellbeing Board – Powers and Duties	Ifeoma Onyia	<p>Principle Responsibilities</p> <p>Halton Health and Wellbeing board acts as a forum in which key leaders from the local health and care system can work together to improve the health and wellbeing of the local population living and working in Halton.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The main duties include: 2. Set the strategic direction to improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities 3. Provide a strong focus on establishing a sense of place. 4. Promoting and encouraging partnership working through joint commissioning and integrated provision between health, children’s services, public health and social care 5. Assessing the health and wellbeing needs in Halton 6. Publishing a joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) 7. Publishing a joint local health and wellbeing strategy (JLHWS) 8. Publish a pharmaceutical needs assessment (PNA) <p>Other responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be responsible for guiding and overseeing the implementation of the ambitions outlined in relevant health and care strategies, guidance and policies that will have an impact on the health and wellbeing of the people living and working in Halton. These include but are not limited to health strategies for England and national operational plans and 	

			<p>local or regional health and wellbeing strategies and action plans.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To promote robust joint commissioning, partnership arrangements and integrated, collaborative provision between health, public health, social care, children’s services, the voluntary and third sector. • To support the collaborative delivery and provision of health and social care for people in Halton. • To assess the needs of the local population and support the statutory Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). • To identify and monitor the reduction of health inequalities. • To develop and monitor relevant activity and performance. • To ensure effective relationships between the HWBB and other strategic boards operating in Halton. • Halton Health and Wellbeing Board will have oversight of local Combatting Drugs Partnership as well as receive report from other relevant groups. • To contribute to the development of health, care and wellbeing services in Halton which may arise as a result of changes in government policy and relevant legislation. • To provide a voice for Halton residents on all matters relating to the commissioning, and provision of health and social care in Halton. 	
8		Mark Reaney	Throughout – in all delegations to Executive Directors, add ‘and Director of Public Health’.	

			<p>Similarly, in references to Directors, add 'and Consultants in Public Health'</p> <p>Appendix 5 – Standing Orders relating to the conduct of Council Business SO9 – Call-in – remove Council throughout SO9 and replace with 'relevant Policy and Performance Board or Board' as appropriate, with the effect that call-ins will be considered by a meeting of the relevant PPB to be held as soon as practicable rather than by full Council as at present, and the rules for debate will be amended accordingly. The same changes will be made to paragraph 14 of the PPB Procedure Rules.</p> <p>Officer Employment Procedure Rules – paragraph 3(b) relating to the constitution of the Appointments Committee – replace 'Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group' and 'Leader of the Conservative Group' with 'Leaders of the two largest Opposition Groups, with tenure to be shared pro-rata in the event of parity'.</p>	
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REPORT TO:	Executive Board
DATE:	16 April 2026
REPORTING OFFICER:	Director of HR & Corporate Affairs
PORTFOLIO:	Corporate Services
SUBJECT:	Pensions Discretions Statement 2026/27.
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 statement for 2026/27

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board approve the revised Pensions Discretions Statement for 2026/27.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Pensions Discretion Statement for 2026/27 is based upon the revised statement for 2025/26, which was approved by Executive Board in October 2025.
- 3.2 There has been a additional discretion added to the Pensions Discretion Statement 2026/27 incorporating the element to reflect the implementation of the Mutually Agreed Resignation Scheme as required.
- 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	Donna Forster Head of HR Operations

**PENSIONS DISCRETIONS
STATEMENT 2026/27**

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 2026/27.

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 2026/27.

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 £8,486 (2025/26 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 £8,486 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: 16th April 2026

REPORTING OFFICER: Zoe Fearon, Executive Director, Children's Services
Lisa Taylor, Interim Director of Transformation

PORTFOLIO: Children and Young People
Transformation

SUBJECT: Children's Services Asset Management
Masterplan

WARD(S) Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 Following the recent 'Children's Services Asset Review', this report provides a strategic overview of capital funding required to align Children's Services assets with the needs of children and families in Halton.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) The Children's Services Asset Masterplan be noted.
- 2) Council include the capital funding required to meet the objectives of the Children's Social Care Placement and Sufficiency Strategy Invest to Save project within the Capital Programme at an estimated cost of up to £2,156,250 as outlined in paragraph 5.1.
- 3) The Executive Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children & Young People and the Section 151 Officer, is given delegated authority to present a full business case to Management Team for approval to draw down capital funding for each element of the sufficiency strategy as outlined in paragraph 5.1.
- 4) Council include requirements for the Children's Services Asset Masterplan relating to 'Office Space and Service Provision' within the overall Corporate Strategy for Halton's Accommodation & Assets review.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Executive Summary

This report presents the Children's Services Asset Management Masterplan (CSAM) and seeks Executive Board support to progress the capital investment required to align Children's Services assets with service redesign, statutory improvement requirements, and the needs of children and families in Halton.

Context

Following the ILACS inspection (May 2024), Children's Services has delivered significant stabilisation and improvement activity, underpinned by:

- The Children's Services Improvement Plan
- Workforce stabilisation and service redesign
- The Children's Social Care Placement and Sufficiency Strategy
- The Families First Partnership Programme

As this work progressed, it became clear that existing assets do not adequately support future service models, placement sufficiency, or community based, multidisciplinary delivery. ICENI Projects were therefore commissioned in October 2025 to undertake a strategic asset review, culminating in the CSAM.

The Asset Masterplan

The CSAM identifies two core asset requirements:

1. Placement Sufficiency Assets (Priority)

Expanding high quality, in-borough residential and supported accommodation to reduce reliance on high cost, out of borough placements.

2. Office and Service Delivery Space

Ensuring fit for purpose accommodation to support Families First delivery, redesigned services, workforce wellbeing and multiagency working (to be aligned with the Council's wider corporate accommodation strategy).

Given inspection expectations, financial pressures and service risk, placement sufficiency is the immediate priority.

Proposed Capital Programme – Invest to Save

The sufficiency element of the CSAM proposes a phased Invest to Save programme (2026–2028) comprising:

- Four children's homes (12 beds) delivered through a partnership with We Are Juno CIC

- Replacement and expansion of care leaver provision (Park House / Appleton Village)
- New 16+ supported accommodation
- 18+ supported independent living provision

Capital investment required: up to **£2.156m**

Estimated borrowing cost: **c. £0.185m per annum**

Forecast recurring revenue benefit: **c. £2.0m per annum** through reduced external placement costs

The cost model applies a worst case scenario to avoid overstating return on investment. Each phase will be brought forward as separate business cases for approval.

Key Benefits of Sufficiency Element

- Improved placement stability, quality and outcomes for children and young people.
- Reduced trauma through local provision and continuity of education, health and family links.
- Significant reduction in reliance on high cost external placements.
- Improved financial sustainability and budget predictability.

Governance and Assurance

Delivery will be managed through the Children's Services Transformation Programme governance, with robust project controls, financial assurance, risk management and benefits tracking. An annual review will confirm ongoing demand and value for money.

3.2 Background and progress so far;

Following the ILACS in May 2024 and subsequent inspection report in July 2024, Children's Services developed a programme around the stabilisation and redesign of Children's Social Care to become a proactive early intervention and prevention system across Halton.

The following workstreams were approved within the programme:

1. A 'Children's Services Improvement Plan' addressing the 12 key areas highlighted in the ILACS inspection report. (reporting to the independently chaired multi-agency 'Children's Services Improvement Board')
2. Stabilisation and redesign of the workforce to enable sustainable transformation of the system (reporting to the Redesign Financial Accountability Board). This included a commitment to both new services in Children's Social Care and a move to a community-based service offer for Halton's Children and Families.

3. 'Children's Social Care Placement and Sufficiency Strategy' designed to provide a range of placements, including children's homes, supported accommodation and foster care, that provide nurturing and safe care and support, within Halton Borough.

All workstreams are underway and significant improvements are evident.

3.3 Children's Placements and Sufficiency

A major finding of the ILACS inspection in May 2024 was that our placement provision for children in care and care leavers needs significant improvement. A lack of accommodation options within the Halton Borough has resulted in reliance on high-cost external providers, some of which are out of the area.

As a corporate parent, we want children to live locally with family members wherever possible and have access to local services that provide for their long-term health, mental health, education, and any other identified specialist needs. Where this is not possible, we need a range of in-borough placements, including children's homes, supported accommodation and foster carers, to meet these needs. The Sufficiency Strategy seeks as far as possible to address these issues and aims to deliver local, high-quality, cost-effective placements for both children in care and care leavers. The aim of these placements is to provide value for money, tailored care, allowing children to engage with their local community, school, friends and family.

3.4 Families First Partnership Programme

In March 2025 the government issued 'The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme Guide', which followed from an independent review of the social care system that highlighted significant systemic challenges. Through stabilisation and redesign of the service, we had already started the journey of working towards a community-based, partner-wide approach of helping families, offering responsive, skilled and intensive support. Government guidance has vindicated the work we had already begun and, through the Families First Partnership, the ambition is to continue to work towards establishing a multi-disciplinary service, which, alongside social workers and early help family workers, and our partners will provide high quality, consistent support to the families of Halton.

Halton's Families First Partnership Programme is partner-wide and, as such, is governed by a Partnership Board inclusive of our health, police, education and voluntary sector partners. It will begin under the umbrella of 'Family Help' and starts with a pilot team, which is the first multi-

disciplinary service to test and learn working in this new way and is set to launch February 2026 and run to August 2026.

3.5 Children's Services Assets

Working through the improvement plan, redesign, Families First Partnership Programme and placements sufficiency it became apparent that some of Halton's Children's Services assets require some changes to meet future demands for the service and the children and families of Halton.

The Transformation Delivery Unit have commissioned an asset master plan project, the purpose of which is to anticipate and plan for future asset needs for Children's Social Care. The goal was to undertake a strategic review and planning exercise to provide Halton with detailed options, and costing for assets/infrastructure requirements needed to support the ambitions of Halton in delivery of the improvement plan, the redesign, Families First Partnership Programme and placements sufficiency strategy.

In October 2025 ICENI Projects were commissioned to undertake this strategic review with 3 key objectives:

1. Sufficiency space: The Children's Services Asset Masterplan (CSAM) will need to incorporate the sufficiency activity, with the objective of ensuring that future plans are considered and aligned within the masterplan.
2. Office space: The CSAM will need to review where staff are based and office space available for desks & meeting rooms with the objective of ensuring that we can meet the ambitions of our redesign and the government reforms.
3. Service Delivery Space: The CSAM will need to incorporate requirements for direct working with family, such as edge of care and family time team work, with the objective of ensuring Halton has adequate space that is fit for purpose for direct work with children and families.

The review is now complete and all findings, with options for Children's Services Assets, can be found in 'Halton Children's Services Asset Masterplan', appendix 1.

Following staff engagement with stakeholders across Children's Services, ICT, Assets and Finance departments, all options have been considered and further refined to feasible, realistic options for capital works over the next 3 years. The final proposal, with financial implications, can be found in appendix 2 and the sufficiency element of the proposal is summarised in section 5.1 of this report.

The options have been categorised into sufficiency and office/provision space. It is recognised that the sufficiency element of the proposal needs to be prioritised to enable Halton to bring young people back into the Borough and reduce high cost placements from out of borough and external residential providers. It is also recognised that the office/provision element of the proposal needs to be included as part of Halton's corporate asset and accommodation review. That said, both sufficiency and office/provision are tied to strict government timelines through ILACS and the Families First Partnership Programme and therefore must be prioritised as part of any corporate approach.

3.6 Benefits of Investing in a Children's Services Asset Masterplan

Improved Placement Sufficiency

- Enhanced control over placement quality and stability through greater proportion of internal residential and supported accommodation services.
- Reduced demand pressures as high-quality internal homes offer earlier intervention opportunities and help prevent escalation into crisis placements.
- Lower expenditure and improved budget predictability by reducing dependency on high-cost private providers and market-driven price inflation.
- Better continuity for children and young people, with local homes enabling consistent education, health provision, peer networks and family contact.
- Reduced trauma and improved outcomes by avoiding out-of-borough moves and the disruption associated with distant placements.
- Improved Social Worker efficiency, with reduced travel time enabling more direct work with children and families.
- Strengthened specialist practice, with opportunities to embed consistent therapeutic approaches and specialist training (e.g., SEND, safeguarding, PACE, trauma-informed care).
- Smoother transitions for 16–18s and care leavers through integrated supported accommodation that promotes independence and reduces homelessness risk.

Improved Office Space and spaces for direct work with Children & Families (Families First and Children's Services Redesign)

- Co-location of teams, improved collaboration between social care, early help, safeguarding, SEND services, health and education partners.
- More efficient use of the Council's estate, creating a more sustainable portfolio aligned to service needs.

- Enhanced workforce wellbeing and retention, with modern workspaces that support hybrid working, reflective practice and professional development.
- Improved service responsiveness as integrated teams can work more effectively together to address risk and coordinate support.
- Earlier, intensive family support, reducing the likelihood of family breakdown and the need for children to enter care.
- Stronger family networks and kinship arrangements, enabling more children to remain safely within their extended family.
- A more stable, well-supported workforce, with better environments for direct family work, multi-agency planning and therapeutic intervention.
- Improved multi-agency coordination, reducing duplication and drift through closer alignment with police, health, and education partners.
- Reduced long-term costs by preventing escalation into statutory services and reducing reliance on residential care and crisis provision.

3.7 Project delivery, monitoring and governance

The programme of capital works will show progress and accountability through the governance structure of the Transformation programme.

One of the key roles of the TDU programme support is to provide the Executive Director for Children's Services the rigour and detail around monitoring of all impacts and financial implications.

This will be undertaken in line with the existing governance structure and reported through the Redesign Financial Accountability Board.

Each part of the Sufficiency Strategy will receive robust project management including:

- Tight delivery and financial controls
- Stringent processes and assurance
- Ownership
- Delivery planning and assurance
- Communication
- Collaborative delivery across the council departments
- Impact measure monitoring

All the above activity will be supported by the relevant corporate function through each stage of the decision making.

This will be overseen through robust governance structures prior to being presented to Management Team.

An annual review will take place to ensure continued demand is evident.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The capital proposal, if approved, would lead to improvements in placements for children, office space for staff and service delivery space for children and families.

There would be a full implementation plan providing the rigour and transparency needed ensuring that funding is utilised in the right parts of the system.

Approval of capital funding will not only support our children to achieve better outcomes, prepare them for adulthood but will also enable them to become valued members of our society supporting Halton of the future. Without this, it is anticipated that we will fail to meet all the recommendations outlined by Ofsted (May 2024) and our statutory duty under the Children's and Family Act 2004 where the main principle is to make a positive and significant contribution to the lives of children. We also anticipate failure to deliver a community-based model through the Families First Programme and failure to deliver improved value for money and care through placements for our children.

Whilst there is no plan for specific policies to be changed at this time, by nature of transformation and the capital works, some policies may be identified as needing to be reviewed.

These would all follow the Council's process for reviewing and agreeing and implementing policies.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 It is recognised there will need to be some fluidity in Halton's approach to enable the service to be responsive to an ever-changing landscape in Children's Services and across Local Government, as such, though the project will still be delivered within the approved capital funding envelope, the order of project delivery may vary over time.

The proposal is therefore indicative and it is likely that it will change, in parts, over a 3 year implementation period. On approval, individual proposals will be submitted to Management Team over the next three years to release the capital funding in line with programme requirements and priorities.

The full description of the proposal, with options, can be found in appendix 2.

Children's Asset Management Plan Cost Estimation

(Sufficiency Element)

Halton Borough Council and We Are Juno CIC have entered into a collaborative partnership aimed at expanding high-quality residential

care provision for children and young people within the borough. Under this arrangement, both organisations share risk and responsibility while co-designing new children's homes, ensuring that each setting is shaped by principles of coproduction, trust, and input from care-experienced children and adults.

The partnership forms a core element of Halton's Children's Residential Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2025–2028 and includes one project to develop four residential homes across Runcorn and Widnes, delivered jointly through a mix of council-provided and provider-sourced properties.

In addition to the new residential homes being developed in partnership with Juno, Halton Borough Council is also progressing plans for a further three supported accommodation properties designed for young people aged 16 and over. These settings will provide structured, supportive environments that help young people develop the practical and emotional skills needed to live independently within the borough. Services of this type play an important role in Halton's care and leaving-care pathway, offering safe accommodation alongside support with daily living skills, confidence-building, education, and employment readiness.

The cost estimation methodology applies a worst-case scenario approach to ensure the return on investment is not overstated. The assumptions underpinning the cost model are detailed in Appendix 3.

Tables below show the individual project impact followed by the final table which summarises the overall impact.

Project 1: Partnership with Juno	
Description	Collaborative partnership to develop four residential homes across Runcorn and Widnes for children and young people ages 8-18.
Capacity	12
Support Type	Various types of support ranging across medium and medium high complexity support needs, dependent on the prevalent needs of the children at the time.
When Online	2026 through to 2028
Investment Needed	£1.475m
Cost of Borrowing	£0.127m per annum for 20 years
Annual Financial Impact	£0.056m cost reduction per annum recurring

Project 2: Park House/Appleton Village	
Description	Replacement for current provision designed to increase capacity and

	quality of support for care leavers between the age of 16 and 17.
Capacity	5
Support Type	Care Leaver Focus (16-18 years)
When Online	Autumn 2026
Investment Needed	£0.331m
Cost of Borrowing	£0.028m over 20 years
Annual Financial Impact	£0.606m cost reduction per annum recurring

Project 3: 16+ Supported Accommodation	
Description	Provision of independent supported accommodation for any 16-18 years olds in care with lower complexity of need.
Capacity	10
Support Type	Supported Accommodation
When Online	Autumn 2026
Investment Needed	£0.206m
Cost of Borrowing	£0.018m per annum for 30 years
Annual Financial Impact	£1.252m cost reduction per annum recurring

Project 4: 18+ Supported Independent Living	
Description	Provision of accommodation for young people aged 18 and over who do not meet Care Act eligibility and present with needs that have hindered their development of independent living skills.
Capacity	10
Support Type	Independent supported flats
When Online	Summer 2028
Investment Needed	£0.144m
Cost of Borrowing	£0.012m per annum for 20 years
Annual Financial Impact	£0.093m cost reduction per annum recurring

Sufficiency Invest to Save Programme Overall Impact	
Description	Investment and delivery of the sufficiency strategy in full
Capacity	13 x beds in partnership Children's homes 5 x beds Care Leavers supported living 10 x flats Supported Accommodation 10 x 18+ Supported Independent living flats
When Online	2026 through 2028

Investment Needed	£2.156m
Cost of Borrowing	£0.185m per annum for 20 years
Annual Financial Impact	Circa £2.008m cost reduction per annum recurring

Delivery Assumptions/ Considerations

It is prudent to acknowledge that there are several factors that impact on the final return on investment as follows:

- **Cost of Borrowing**

The interest rates and associated financing costs linked to securing capital, which will directly influence overall affordability and the projected return on investment.

- **Property Acquisition Costs**

The purchase price of suitable properties, including valuation, legal fees, surveys, and any associated transactional costs that impact the total initial investment.

- **Construction and Materials Costs**

Fluctuations in the cost of building materials, labour, and contractor fees, which may affect the viability and timing of capital works.

- **Variability in Residential Placement Costs**

Changes in the cost of external residential placements over time, which may alter the projected financial benefits and payback period of bringing provision in-house.

- **Changing Needs of Children and Young People**

Evolving care, accommodation, and support needs that may influence the scale, design, and long-term suitability of the proposed provision.

- **Interdependencies with Wider Development Activity in the Borough**

Alignment with, or potential impacts from, broader regeneration, housing, or capital development projects that may affect timelines, resource availability, or strategic direction.

Proposed Funding Approach

Based on current rates, the projected cost of borrowing over a 20-year term is estimated at up to £185,322 per year, assuming full utilisation of the available funding, including a 25% contingency. A rigorous approach to project planning and delivery will ensure value for money and responsible use of resources. Contingency funds will only be drawn upon once all alternative options have been fully explored and exhausted.

We anticipate that financial savings will be achieved through a reduction in placement costs. However, the number of children requiring care, and the associated placement demand, is influenced by a wide range of factors and cannot be attributed to a single workstream.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

This work will directly impact the promotion of wellbeing and greater independence for children, young people and families. Children's Social Care can have a positive impact on health and wellbeing by improving emotional and mental health, establishing safe environments for children and families to flourish, opening opportunities and improving life chances for those it supports.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

Increasing in-borough provision supports how we continue to grow the local economy for and with residents by providing new employment and supporting the local economy in Halton.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

The Corporate Plan is very clear on the priorities for Halton. This business case directly supports priority three: Supporting Children, Young People and Families.

It will support this through the implementation of the early intervention and prevention approach, improving outcomes for children and families as well as strengthening work across the key partnerships within the system.

Where support is required, be it from the Council or one of its partners, we will work to transform the system to ensure that every child and their family receive the right support at the right time to deal with problems at the earliest opportunity, maximising the outcomes for them and their family.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

Strengthening Halton's early intervention and prevention approach to supporting children and families. This also supports the ambition to provide support in a consistent manner and, in turn, ensuring that there is a consistent approach to the delivery of services and breaking down areas of inequality if they are identified.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

Whilst there will be no direct planned impact on a greener future, by nature some of the improvement works will have a positive impact on climate through promoting cultural change and use of technology, online meetings, reduction in printing, reducing travel.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

Supporting Children Young People and families to nurture and protect every child and young person and raise their aspirations by investing in improving services and provision to ensure they reach their full potential and help Halton families flourish and be valued members of Halton's community.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 The risks below are the key strategic risks that have been identified if this business case recommendations are not agreed:

- Improvement from "Inadequate" does not progress at pace, delaying the improvement of services being provided to the children and families of Halton.
- Outcomes for Children, as identified through inspections, reviews and reports, lead to continued poor inspection results and more importantly, not improving outcomes for the children and families of Halton
- Financially sustainable Children's Services system is not achieved due to the delay in redesign and implementing an early intervention and prevention approach.
- Not correctly understanding and tracking the financial benefits / implications of the capital works may result in the Council being in a financially unsustainable position.
- Not understanding the analysis of demand and complexity growth, which will have a significant impact if this is not under control.
- Financial benefits are not realised due to inability to place children in the homes and the partner places children from outside of the borough – the case takes this in to consideration when looking at capacity/utilisation and impact achievability.
- Further delay to implementation could lead to:

- Breakdown of contract/partnership relationship leading to contractual issues.
- Delay in realising the annual financial benefits – impacting financial recovery.
- Each month delay has financial implications for not moving children in to the more efficient costed placements.

7.2 Risk Management Plan

There is a central Risk Log for Children's Services Improvement and Transformation Programme, and it is expected all project leads will maintain their risks and issues. Any fundamental changes to the capital works needs to be agreed by the Children's Services Leadership Team to ensure the scope and impact of activity is understood and assessed before progressing, as well as ensuring deliverables are kept specific, tight, managed and smart.

The risk will be managed through a stringed change management plan subject to approval from the Children's Leadership Team.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Whilst there will be no direct planned impact on climate change, by nature some of the improvement works will have a positive impact on climate through promoting cultural change and use of technology, online meetings, reduction in printing and reducing travel.

10. REASON(S) FOR DECISION

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The decision to take this approach is based on:

1. Supporting the ambitions of the Corporate Plan.
2. Delivering the ambitions and vision of the Children & Young Peoples plan.
3. Transforming the Children's Services system to an early intervention and prevention system whilst addressing the financial sustainability of the local system.
4. Doing the right things for the children and families at Halton
5. And ensuring the right support is available at the right time.

11. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

Carry on improvement journey without required capital funding

Work has already begun through the transformation programme to stabilise and transform Children's Services. It had identified requirements and work is in progress.

The pace and impact is severely hampered due to time, cost and resource constraints across the Council, not just in Children's Services.

Progress is being made but not at the scale and pace required to improve services in the manner and pace required by the inspecting bodies.

It was decided early on that to not invest is not an option due to the potential additional impacts/ramifications financially, operationally and reputationally for the Council, and most of all the pace and change needed for the children, young people and their families of Halton.

12. IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Should approval be given on by the Executive Board on 16th April 2026 then the Implementation programme will commence with immediate effect.

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

- MacAlister, J., 2022. The independent review of children's social care.
- Love Barrow Families, 2022. Children's Social Care- The Way Forward
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023) A guide to multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children.

- The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme Guide Delivery expectations for safeguarding partners in England March 2025

PART 2 REPORTS – N/A

14. **JUSTIFICATION FOR TAKING THE ITEM IN PART II**

N/A

Halton Children's Services Asset Masterplan

Prepared by Icen Projects
for Halton Borough Council

December 2025

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The logo for iceni, featuring the word "iceni" in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font inside a white circle.The logo for Halton Borough Council, featuring a stylized lowercase 'h' above the words "HALTON" and "BOROUGH COUNCIL" in a bold, uppercase, sans-serif font.

Contents

1. Background Information
2. Introduction
3. Baseline
4. Service Requirements
5. Space Provision Scenarios
6. Recommendations & Conclusions



1. Background Information

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Following the ILACS inspection in May 2024 and the subsequent report published in July 2024, Children's Services developed a programme focused on stabilisation and redesign, with the aim of establishing a proactive system of early intervention and prevention across Halton.

The programme comprises three key workstreams:

- 1. Children's Services Improvement Plan:** A comprehensive Improvement Plan addressing the 12 priority areas identified through the ILACS inspection. Delivery is overseen by an independently chaired, multi-agency Children's Services Improvement Board.
- 2. Workforce stabilisation and redesign:** A significant investment to stabilise and redesign the Children's Social Care workforce, enabling sustainable system transformation. This workstream reports to the Redesign Financial Accountability Board and includes the development of new services alongside a shift towards a community-based service offer for children and families in Halton.
- 3. Children's Social Care Placement and Sufficiency Strategy:** A strategy to develop a sufficient range of in-borough placements, including children's homes, supported accommodation and foster care, providing safe, nurturing and sustainable care for children in care and care leavers.

All workstreams are underway and are delivering demonstrable improvements.

Children's Placements and Sufficiency

The ILACS inspection identified significant weaknesses in placement provision for children in care and care leavers. In particular, limited accommodation within Halton has resulted in reliance on high-cost external placements, including those located outside the borough.

As a corporate parent, Halton seeks to support children to live locally wherever possible, including with family members, and to ensure access to services that meet their long-term health, mental health, educational and specialist needs. Where this is not achievable, there must be a sufficient supply of high-quality in-borough placements.

The Placement and Sufficiency Strategy aims to address these challenges by increasing the availability of local, high-quality and cost-effective placements. These placements will support better outcomes for children by enabling them to remain connected to their communities, schools, friends and families, while also delivering value for money.

Families First Partnership Programme

In March 2025, the government published The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme Guide, following an independent review of children's social care which highlighted significant national challenges.

Through the stabilisation and redesign programme, Halton had already begun moving towards a community-based model of early help and intensive family support. The FFP guidance has validated this direction of travel. Participation in the Families First Partnership will enable Halton to further develop a multi-disciplinary approach, bringing together social workers, early help family workers and partner professionals to provide consistent, high-quality support to families.

The programme will commence with a Family Help Team pilot, which will test and learn from new ways of working. The pilot is scheduled to run from February 2026 to August 2026.

1. Background Information

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Children's Assets

Progress across the improvement plan, service redesign, Families First Partnership Programme and placement sufficiency work has highlighted the need to review and adapt Halton's children's assets to meet future demand.

The Transformation Delivery Unit therefore commissioned a Children's Services Asset Masterplan to provide a strategic assessment of current provision and to identify costed options for the assets and infrastructure required to support delivery of these programmes.

In October 2025, ICENI Projects were commissioned to undertake this review, focusing on three areas: sufficiency space for residential, supported accommodation and fostering provision; office space to support service re-organisation; and service delivery space for direct work with children and families, including contact and edge-of-care interventions.

The review is now complete, with findings and options set out in this report. Following engagement with Children's Services, ICT, Assets and Finance colleagues, options have been refined into feasible proposals for capital works over the next three years.

2. Introduction

2. Introduction

INTRODUCTION

Halton Borough Council (HBC) commissioned Icen Projects to develop an Asset Masterplan for Children's Services in Halton.

Children's Services are essential to local communities and help to ensure that every child has the best possible start in life. The 2004 Children Act made local authorities responsible for ensuring and overseeing the effective delivery of services for children, including providing a range of services tailored to children's needs, and working collaboratively with other agencies to improve outcomes for children.

However, the costs of delivering such care have increased exponentially over recent years, while at the same time, council revenues and capacity to deliver services has severely diminished. In Halton, reports of private children homes charging the authority significantly high weekly rates has raised questions over the suitability of current arrangements and identified a need for review to better cater for current and future needs.

Now HBC is implementing a Families First Programme which aims to streamline and coordinate multi-agency and service response to support families and children across the community. This will require a change in ways of working with greater collaboration of council services.

At the heart of the issue lies the importance of children's services delivering support to the most in need and vulnerable members of the community. The adequacy and outcomes of these services can have generational impacts and must be given the importance and focus it deserves.

In this context, HBC have commissioned this strategic review and master-planning exercise to consider options, plans and costs for assets needed to support service delivery now and, in the future, alongside the reforms of the Families First Partnership Programme.

METHODOLOGY & APPROACH

This report has been developed using the following methodology and approach:

- Inception meeting
- Ongoing PM
- Document Review – of key existing and emerging policies and strategies at a local, regional and national level
- Stakeholder Interviews - one-on-one, meetings with more than 10 stakeholders, including private childcare service providers, and HBC staff
- Site Visit – coordinated site visits to all family hubs and HBC owned properties
- Baseline data – detailed analysis of socio-demographic data, focusing characteristics which may drive demand for children's services
- Projections – population projections, identifying future child service age population
- Supply –review and map existing children's care service spaces, identifying the number, type, location, size, age, and quality of space.
- Demand – assess the potential future demand for various elements of Child Services spaces outline gaps and issues
- Service requirements – consider future service space requirements
- Stakeholder Workshop No.1 – a multi-agency workshop, with up to 15 stakeholders, to discuss the existing space provision, the limitations and future needs for space to adequately service the needs of children across the borough

2. Introduction

METHODOLOGY & APPROACH

- Space provision scenarios – identify potential options for the delivery of adequate space for the provision of service delivery.
- Service cost – a high level cost analysis for the various provision scenarios.
- Workshop No. 2 – a multi-agency workshop with internal Council stakeholders to discuss / finalise the potential options for each asset and to establish priorities.
- Recommendations – based on this analysis we have prepared a series of recommendations for the provision of space to support service delivery.
- Report – This report, presenting the findings of the research, and recommendations and next steps.

CAVEATS

This report has not been produced by a regulated financial advisor (FCA) or RICS qualified consultants nor has it involved QS consultants or architect designs. The approach involves high-level cost benchmarks designed to provide an order of magnitude for potential costs. Further work is needed at the next stage involving feasibility work, architect designs and QS costings.

3. Baseline

3. Baseline

INTRODUCTION

This section provides an overview of the current local policy and strategy for children and family services; socio-demographic data for the borough; a review of the age profile and growth in child age populations; rates of need by current population and socio-demographic character; benchmarks against other areas; and a review of population projections, identifying child service age population and socio-demographic character, taking into account major future development impacts.

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES POLICY

Children Act 2004

The updated Children Act 2004 followed on from the Children Act 2004 which set the foundation of all child protection and welfare work. This established a paramount principle that a child's welfare is the most important consideration and set out a requirement for local authorities to safeguard and promote children's welfare including statutory duties under Children in Need (family support, short breaks, practical assistance) and Child Protection (mandatory investigation where there is reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm).

The 2004 update to the Act strengthened inter-agency working and created Local Safeguarding Children's Boards and the role of Director of Children's Services. It also embedded the Every Child Matters outcomes.

Children and Families Act 2014

This Act reformed services for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), extending SEND support up to age 25, and introduced Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans. The Act requires local authorities to publish a Local Offer clearly outlining SEND services and emphasised the involvement of children, young people and parents in decision making. This legislation ensures services are person-centred and better co-ordinated across education, health and social care.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)

This is statutory guidance that sets out how organisations work together to safeguard children. For local authorities this means leading multi-agency safeguarding partnerships with health and police, ensuring early help services are available to prevent escalation to statutory intervention, establishing clear information sharing protocols and ensuring practitioners are trained and supervising effectively. Failure to follow this guidance results in serious safeguarding failures and poor Ofsted outcomes.

Keeping Children Safe in Education

This is statutory guidance that applies to primary schools but has implications for local authorities including supporting schools in safeguarding requirements ensuring appropriate procedures for reporting concerns, including referrals, children's social care; and promoting safer recruitment practices and safeguarding training. This policy strengthens early identification of abuse and neglect in educational settings.

Children and Social Work Act 2017

This Act strengthens the role of local authorities as corporate parents to looked-after children and care leavers. Key duties include acting in the best interests of children in care; improving stability in placements and educational outcomes; extending personal advisor support for care leavers up to age 25; and promoting access to health services, housing and employment.

Care Leaver Strategy

Local authorities are required to publish a Care Leaver Local Offer, setting out what support care leavers can expect. This includes suitable and stable accommodation; financial support; education, training, and employment opportunities; and access to health and wellbeing services. This policy ensure consistency and transparency in care leaver support across local authorities.

3. Baseline

Stable Homes, Built on Love (2023) – Children’s Social Care Reform Strategy

This strategy followed the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care. Key priorities for local authorities including improving family help and early intervention to prevent children entering care; ensuring children in care have stable placement and strong relationships with trusted adults; strengthening corporate parenting responsibilities and improving support for care leavers.

Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme (2021-present)

The Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme is a national government initiative introduced in 2021 to improve outcomes for children, young people and families by joining up services locally. It builds on the previous early-intervention models such as Sure Start, but is a whole-family, life-course approach.

The programme focuses particularly on the first 1,001 days of a child’s life (from conception to age 2), while Family hubs more broadly support families with children aged 0-19, or up to 25 for young people with SEND. Local authorities are responsible for leading and coordinating the programme at a local level.

The main aims reflect national policy priorities around early help, prevention and reducing inequalities:

- Improve early childhood development, health and school readiness
- Strengthen infant-parent relationships
- Provide earlier, preventative support to families
- Reduce demand on statutory children’s social care services
- Ensure families can access support easily, in one place

A Family Hub is a coordinated network of services designed to be non-stigmatising, accessible and responsive to local needs. These services may include:

- A physical hub (often a repurposed children’s centre)
- Outreach and digital services
- Strong referral pathways between agents

Local authorities must ensure that Family Hubs provide or coordinate access to:

- Health Services: midwifery & health visiting; infant feeding and breastfeeding support; perinatal and parental mental health services; early identification of developmental concerns
- Parenting and Family Support: evidence-based parenting programmes; support for parental conflict and relationship difficulties; domestic abuse awareness and referral pathways; advice on routines, attachment and behaviour
- Early Education and Childcare: support with early learning and school readiness; information on funded childcare entitlements; support for children with SEND
- Youth and Adolescent Support: mental health & emotional wellbeing support; youth services; support with transitions to adulthood

Local authorities have strategic and operational responsibility for the programme including developing a local Family Hub model based on community needs; commissioning and coordinating services; ensuring clear referral pathways into early help and specialist services; and using data to identify families who may benefit from early intervention.

Practitioners are encouraged to build trusted relationships with families to reduce fear and stigma. Family Hubs also play a crucial role in safeguarding through prevention, in a way that aligns with Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023) expectations, with the aim of reducing crisis-driven interventions.

3. Baseline

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES POLICY cont.

Families First Programme

The Families First programme was introduced as a preventative, early-intervention approach for families with multiple and complex needs. The main aim is to support families before problems escalate, reducing the need for statutory interventions under children's social care. It recognises that problems with families are often interconnected and addressing them in isolation is less effective.

Key Principles:

- Whole-Family Approach: The programme works with all family members rather than focusing on a single individual. It encourages coordinated support to improve family resilience and long-term outcomes.
- Early Intervention: Families are supported before issues escalate into a crisis which prevents unnecessary involvement of statutory child protection services.
- Strengths-Based Practice: Practitioners focus on the family's existing strengths and capabilities which builds confidence and skills within the family, empowering them to solve problems independently.
- Personalised Support: Each family is assigned a Lead Practitioner who coordinates services, sets goals, monitors progress and ensures accountability.

As part of the programme, local authorities are responsible for:

- Identifying eligible families through referral pathways (e.g. schools, health, police)
- Coordinating multi-agency support which can include:
 - Children's Social Care
 - Education support services

- Health visiting, mental health or substance misuse services
- Housing or employment support
- Voluntary and community sector organisations

- Monitoring and evaluation progress, ensuring goals are met and services are adjusted as needed
- Providing training and supervision for lead practitioners to deliver effective family-focused interventions

Overall, the key components of the Families First Programme are:

- Lead Practitioner / Key Worker Model – central to building trust, coordinating services and ensuring consistent support.
- Family Action Plan – identifies issues, goals and progress measures, agreed with the family.
- Multi-Agency Working – avoids fragmented support and duplication of services.
- Outcome Measurement – improvements in children's safety, wellbeing, educational engagement, and family stability.

The expected impact on Children's Services of the programme include:

- Reduced demand on statutory child protection services by resolving issues early
- Improved safeguarding outcomes by identifying risk factors proactively.
- Supported educational engagement by addressing underlying family barriers.
- Strengthened inter-agency collaboration
- Promotion of preventative, cost-effective interventions rather than reactive measures.

3. Baseline

LOCAL & REGIONAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES POLICY

Revised Statutory Direction for Halton Children's Services (February 2025)

A revised statutory direction was issued by the Department for Education (DfE) in February 2025 after an inadequate Ofsted inspection. This required Halton Borough Council (HBC) to continue to work with a DfE Children's Services Improvement Advisor and make improvements across children's social care. This statutory direction shapes local authority governance, accountability, improvement planning and how services operate across safeguarding, assessment and intervention.

Halton Children and Young People's Partnership Plan (2024-2027)

Halton's overarching strategic plan for children and young people sets out local priorities, needs assessments and agreed actions across partners (local authority, health, education, police, voluntary sector). This includes a shared vision, sets priority areas that drive commissioning, service design and performance monitoring, and guides collective action across early years, education, health, social care, youth services, families and SEND. This plan underpins local policy decisions and resource allocation, ensuring that services across the borough work collaboratively on agreed objectives.

Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) Multi-Agency Arrangements (2023)

Under Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023), Halton's safeguarding partners (HBC, Cheshire Merseyside ICB, and Cheshire Constabulary) jointly define how agencies work together to protect children. This sets out how safeguarding concerns are identified, assessed and responded to; clarifies roles and responsibilities across agencies; and includes quality assurance, learning reviews and joint planning. It operationalises how children at risk of harm are protected in Halton, shaping multi-agency working culture and procedures.

Pan-Cheshire & Halton Safeguarding Procedures (June 2025)

The Pan-Cheshire & Halton online safeguarding procedures detail frontline practice on topics such as responding to abuse, thresholds for referrals, assessments and multi-agency planning. Changes in June 2025 ensure alignment with national guidance.

Cheshire & Merseyside Children & Young People's Mental Health Plan (2024-26)

Delivered by NHS Cheshire & Merseyside Integrated Care Board, this plan outlines priorities and coordinated work across the region to support child and adolescent mental health. It integrates local need into a broader strategy, building on system wide engagement in 2024. Halton Children's Services work with health partners under this plan to improve mental health support pathways, early help and crisis responses.

Family Hubs and Start for Life Implementation (2024-25)

Halton has been recognised for strong progress in rolling out Family Hubs, bringing together health visiting, parenting support, early years, mental health and family services in accessible community settings. Several Hubs provide non-stigmatising support for families from pregnancy onwards and integrated services including health, early education, SEND support, housing, mental health, debt advice and youth services. The programme has received national funding to support delivery.

Halton Strategy for Children in Care & Care Leavers (2023-26)

This strategy sets out how HBC and partner agencies will work together over a 3-year period to improve outcomes for children in care and care leavers, ensuring they will have the same opportunities as their peers and can reach their full potential. Key principles include being child-centred and rights-based, multi-agency partnership working and having a focus on permanence and stability.

3. Baseline

LOCAL & REGIONAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES POLICY cont.

Halton Placement Sufficiency Strategy (2025-28)

This sets out how HBC will meet its statutory duty to secure sufficient, suitable accommodation and placements for children looked after and care leavers who cannot safely remain at home. This strategy drives commissioning, planning and partnership activity to improve placement availability and outcomes for these children.

The core aims and outcomes of the strategy are:

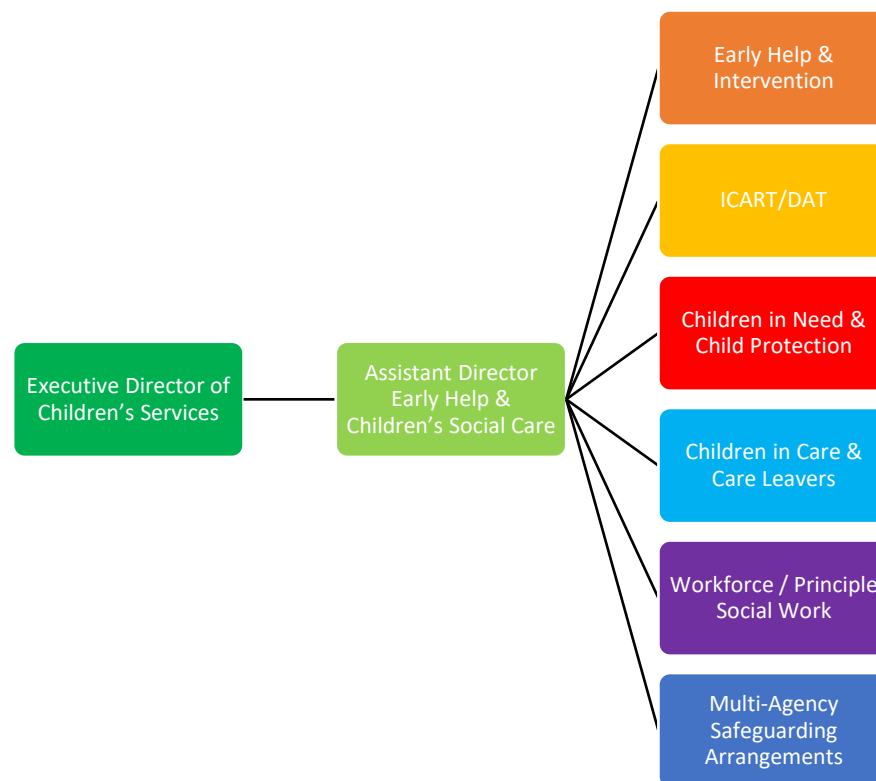
- Permeance & Stability – promote family-based placements through fostering, kinship care, special guardianship or adoption and ensure permanency planning starts early and informs placement decisions.
- Local Provision – increase local placement sufficiency so that children are cared for near home and reduce the need for children to be placed far away, improving contact with family/friends and continuity in education and community.
- Range of Accommodation Options – strengthen accommodation options for older young people (16/17+), including supported lodgings and semi-independent living to meet diverse needs, and ensure sufficiency in in-borough placements and appropriate out-of-borough options where necessary.
- Commissioning & Partnership Working – Use data, commissioning and strategic partnerships to plan and shape the local placement market, work with providers to develop the range of placements needed (e.g. foster care, supported accommodation, therapeutic provision), and seek better outcomes while managing costs and quality standards.
- Care Planning – improve care planning processes, ensuring clarity about placement needs from the outset, and better align with commissioning strategy and provider availability.

CURRENT DELIVERY MODEL

The diagram below sets out the current delivery model for Children's Services at Halton Borough Council (HBC).

The service is led by the Executive Director of Children's Services. The Assistant Director of Early Help & Children's Social Care reports to the Executive Director, and has a team of 4: a Designated Social Care Officer, a Social Care Improvement Lead and 2 Resourcing Officers.

Figure 3.1 HBC Children's Social Care Organisation Structure



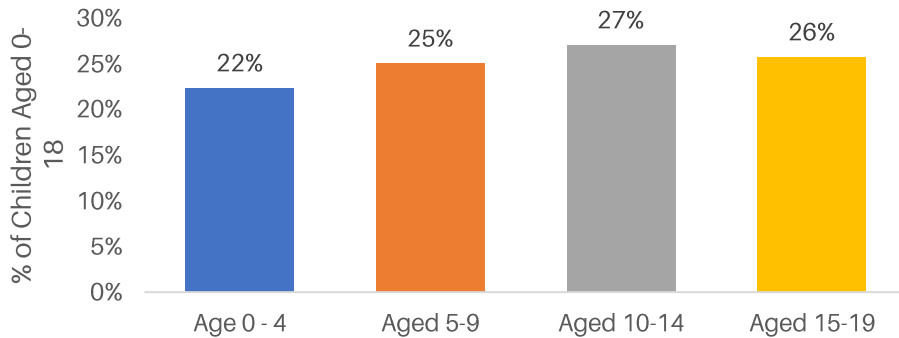
3. Baseline

AGE PROFILE

Latest figures by the ONS for 2024 show that there are 29,395 children aged 0-18 in Halton. This is equivalent to 22% of the total population, which is in line with the regional and national average.

There are 8,268 children aged 10-14 in Halton, equivalent to 27% of the population aged 0-19. This is the largest age group, followed by 15-19 (7,885; 26%), 5-9 (7,663; 25%). The smallest age group is age 0-4 is made up of 6,829 children (22%). This is broadly in line with regional and national averages.

Figure 3.1 Children in Halton by Age Group (2024)

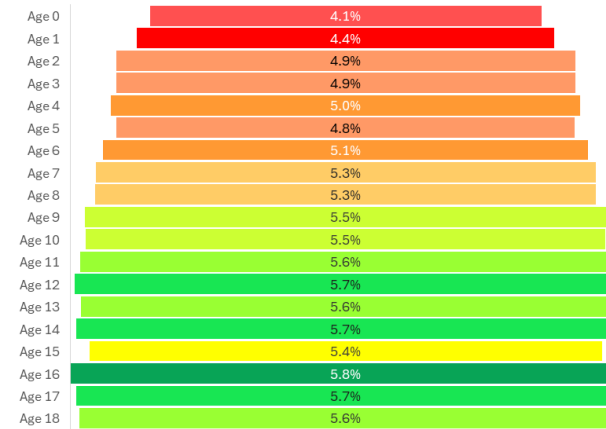


Source: ONS

Breaking these figures in single year age bands, there is a divide in the proportion of children aged 0-18 from age 9, with there being a higher proportion of children aged 9+ than below. This implies that there is a declining population of children expected to move through the borough over the next decade.

Figure 3.2 shows the change in children aged 0-18 by age group over the last 20 years. There are 1,230 less children in Halton in total since 2004 (-4%), but only 195 less since 2014 (-1%).

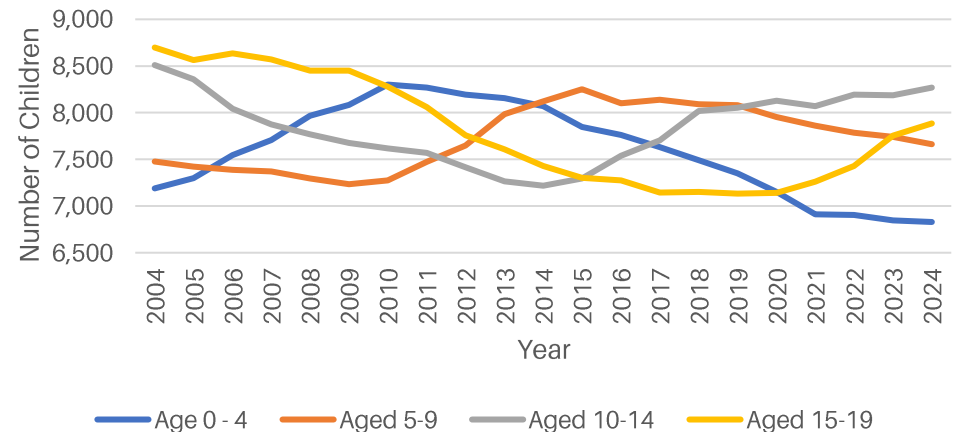
Figure 3.2 Children in Halton by Single Year of Age as a % of Children Aged 0-18 (2024)



Source: ONS
Page 7 of 20

Figure 3.3 shows the change in children aged 0-18 by age group over the last 20 years. There are 1,230 less children in Halton in total since 2004 (-4%), but only 195 less since 2014 (-1%).

Figure 3.3 Change in Number of Children by Age Group (2004-2024)



3. Baseline

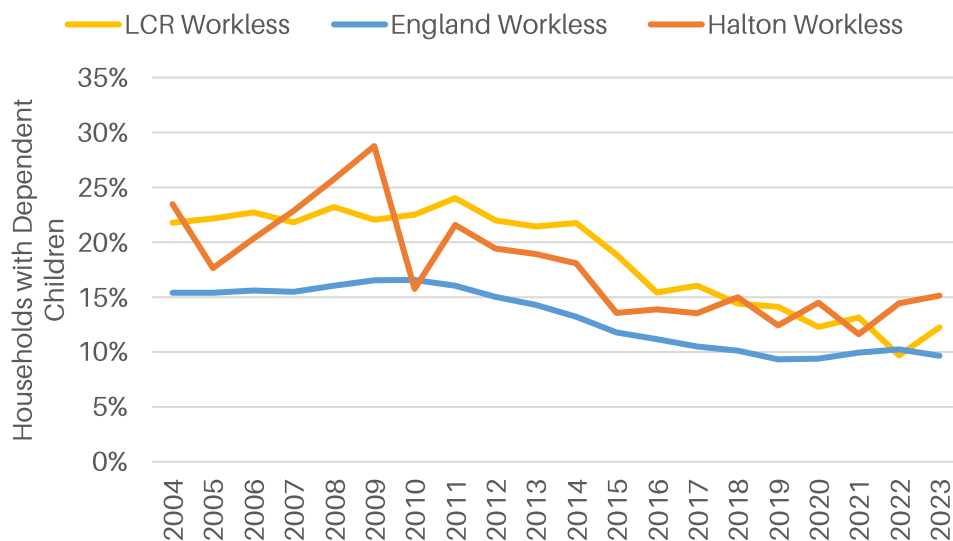
AGE PROFILE cont.

The number of children aged 0-4 has had the most significant decreasing trend, decreasing by 1,441 children (17%) since 2011 and remains on a downward trend. The number of children aged 5-9 has been falling since 2015 (8%), after a period of growth since 2009. The number of children aged 10-14 has grown by 14% since 2014, making it now the largest age group, while children aged 15-19 began growing in 2017 (9%), following a 10-year period of decline.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

In Halton, there are around 1.8 dependent children per household. This is also true for both lone parents and couples. The number of dependent children per household is showing an increasing trend since 2021.

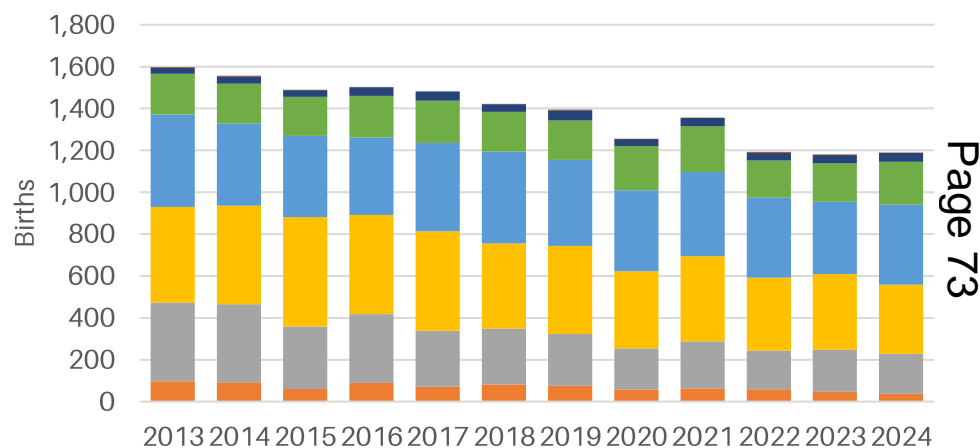
Figure 3.5 Workless Households with Dependent Children (2004-2023)



Source: ONS

Children living in workless households is often a key factor in families ending up in difficulties that result in requiring support from Children’s Services. In 2023, there were 3,800 workless households in Halton with dependent children. This is equivalent to 15% of all households with dependent children. Despite a reduction of 1,500 workless households with dependent children in 2013, a recent increase since 2021 means that a higher proportion of households with dependent children are workless than the regional and national average.

Figure 3.6 Birth Age of Mothers (2013-2024)



Source: ONS

In 2024, there were 1,190 births in Halton. This is below the average annual number of births over the last decade (1,385 births), with births following a decreasing trend over the period. 3.2% of mothers in Halton were aged under 20 in 2024, equivalent to 38 births. Whilst this is down from 6.1% in 2013 when there were 97 births, this is higher than the average in Liverpool City Region (LCR) and in England. A high proportion of young mothers can often put a higher pressure on Children’s Services due to reasons such as increased social and economic needs, higher health and wellbeing risks, parenting and safeguarding challenges and multi-agency demand.

3. Baseline

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS cont.

According to the latest ONS Indices of Multiple Deprivation, Halton is more deprived than 81% of local authority districts in England.

Deprivation is highest in the borough in Health and Disability (more deprived than 93%), Employment (more deprived than 86%), and Crime (more deprived than 81%). Halton is also within the 40% most deprived local authorities for Income and Education.

Central Halton is generally more deprived, across both Widnes and Runcorn. Some areas in the outskirts of the borough, however, are some of the least deprived in the country.

Figure 3.8 shows the outcome of comparing Halton to its statistical neighbours using a benchmarking tool. Halton has relatively low home ownership, high deprivation and high numbers of single family households. However, there are low levels of disability, low levels of free school meals, low unemployment and high qualifications.

Figure 3.7 Halton Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2025)

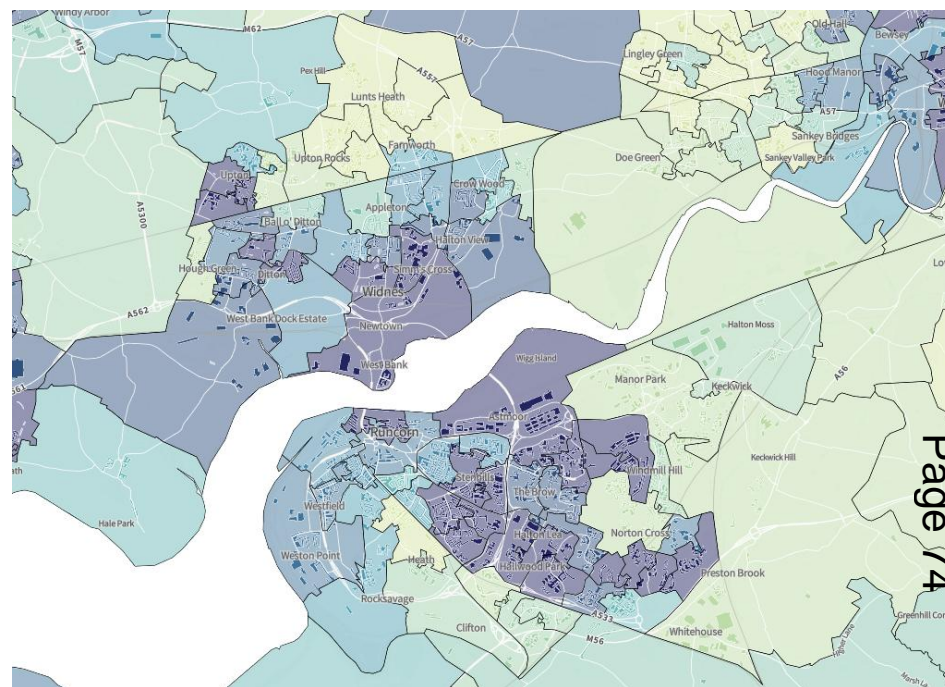


Figure 3.8 Children's Services Statistical Neighbour Benchmarking Tool

la_name	Year 6 Obese or overweight	% of Infants Taking Free School Meals	% of households with dep. children deprived in 1 dimension	% of households with dep. children deprived in 3 dimensions	% of households with dep. children where 0 persons are disabled whose day-to-day activities are limited	% of households with dep. children where 1 or more adults are employed	% of households with dep. children where 1 or more persons have a non-limiting long-term physical or mental health condition	% of households with a single family dep. Child	% of households where the property is owned (outright or with a mortgage)	% of HRP of working age who are unemployed but have worked in the past 12 months	% of HRP of working age who have no qualification	% of usual residents with religion - Christian
Barnsley	40.0	33.9	29.9	3.8	86.0	83.3	16.3	25.4	62.8	3.2	15.1	51.3
County Durham	39.8	32.2	29.6	2.8	85.9	81.5	17.2	23.9	62.8	3.7	12.9	54.6
Gateshead	41.4	32.0	29.8	3.4	87.3	81.9	16.7	23.6	58.4	3.5	13.6	50.8
Halton	40.3	30.7	29.9	3.5	85.2	82.1	15.6	26.7	61.2	3.4	12.1	58.6
Redcar and Cleveland	40.1	31.6	30.0	3.1	85.4	80.1	16.8	24.1	65.2	3.9	14.9	53.0
Rotherham	41.1	30.4	30.2	3.5	86.2	83.2	16.3	26.3	64.0	3.5	15.1	49.0
Sefton	38.4	32.7	29.4	2.6	85.6	85.6	16.1	23.1	67.3	3.5	13.1	64.4
St Helens	44.0	32.4	29.5	3.2	85.1	82.8	16.7	25.2	65.0	3.2	13.5	62.3
Stockton-on-Tees	42.0	28.8	28.2	2.7	86.8	84.2	17.0	27.3	66.6	3.6	13.4	51.1
Sunderland	45.0	32.1	31.6	3.4	84.7	80.6	16.5	27.8	58.5	3.7	14.4	53.2
Wirral	36.7	34.2	29.3	2.5	84.2	83.4	16.7	24.8	65.6	3.6	11.9	55.0

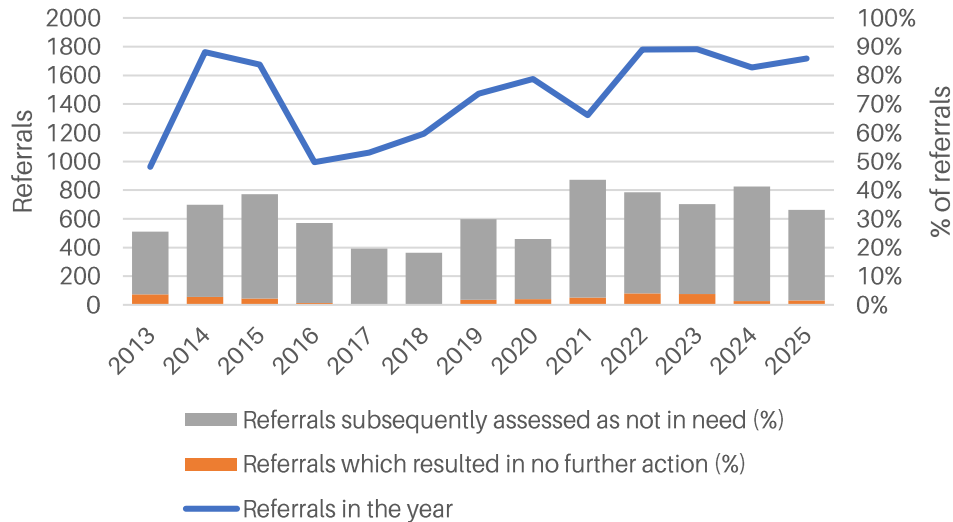
3. Baseline

REFERRALS

Figure 3.9 presents the number of referrals to social services over the last decade. This shows that referrals have increased slightly since 2015 to 1,717, a 3% increase (43 more cases). However, following 2015, there was a sharp drop in referrals of 40%. Since then, referrals have been mostly rising year-on-year, until they levelled out in 2022.

However, the proportion of referrals that are subsequently assessed as either not in need or no further action required is higher in the last 6 years than previous years.

Figure 3.9 Referrals to Social Services (2013-2025)

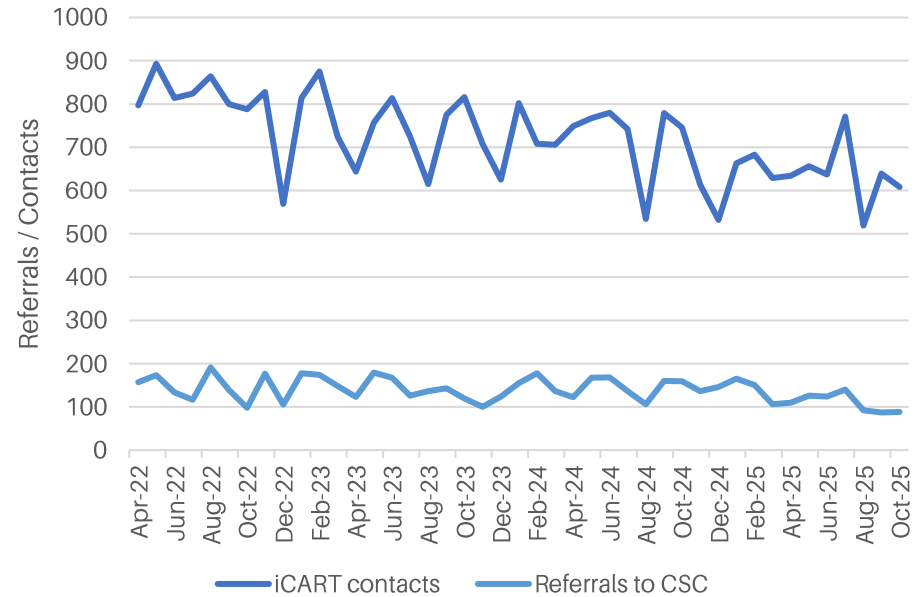


Source: DfE

The most frequent source of referrals in Halton in 2025 was the police, accounting for 35% of referrals. Before 2022, local authorities used to be the next most frequent source. However, local authority referrals have since reduced and now a large amount come through from schools (18%). Health services are also a significant source for referrals.

Figure 3.10 shows the number of contacts to ICART between April 2022 to October 2025. In the year to date, there were 7,584 contacts to the local authority referral service. This has followed a downward linear trend since April 2022. Referrals to Children’s Social Care have also been on a generally downward trend, despite fluctuations in some months during the period.

Figure 3.10 Halton Children’s Services Pathways (April 2022-October 2025)



Source: HBC

3. Baseline

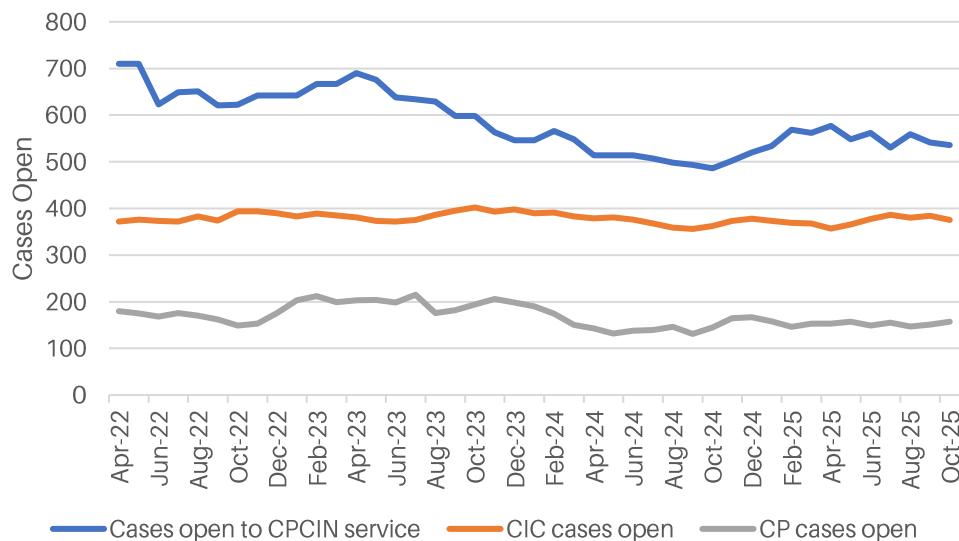
CASES OPEN

Figure 3.11 presents the number of cases open each month across different Children’s Services in Halton since April 2022. In October 2025, there were 536 cases open to the Child Protection and Child in Need (CPCIN) service. This has followed a downward trend since April 2022, when there were 710 open cases.

29% of CPCIN cases open in October 2025 were Child Protection cases. The number of Child Protection cases has been following a relatively downward trend for the last 2 years, following higher numbers during 2023.

In October 2025, there were 375 Child in Care cases open in Halton. This is only 2 more cases than in April 2022 and there has only been minor monthly fluctuation over the period.

Figure 3.11 Halton Children’s Services Cases Open (April 2022-October 2025)

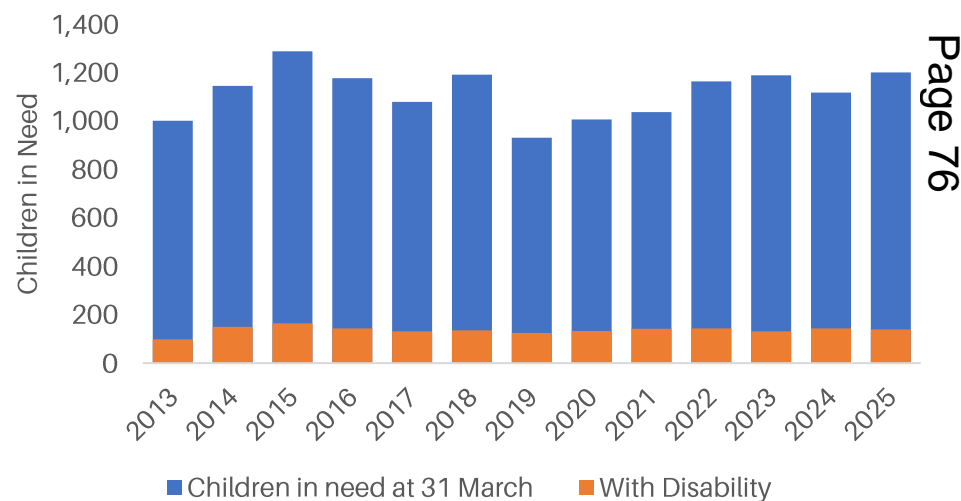


CHILDREN IN NEED

In the year to March 2025, there were 1,201 Children in Need in Halton. This is 88 less children (-7%) than in 2015. However, 2015 was a year that experiences a spike in cases, which was followed by a generally downward trend, and this has then been rising since 2019 (+270 children).

Also in the year to March 2025, there were 12% of Children in Need that had a disability, equivalent to 140 children. This is 24 less children than in 2015, a decrease of 15%.

Figure 3.12 Halton Children in Need (2013-2025)



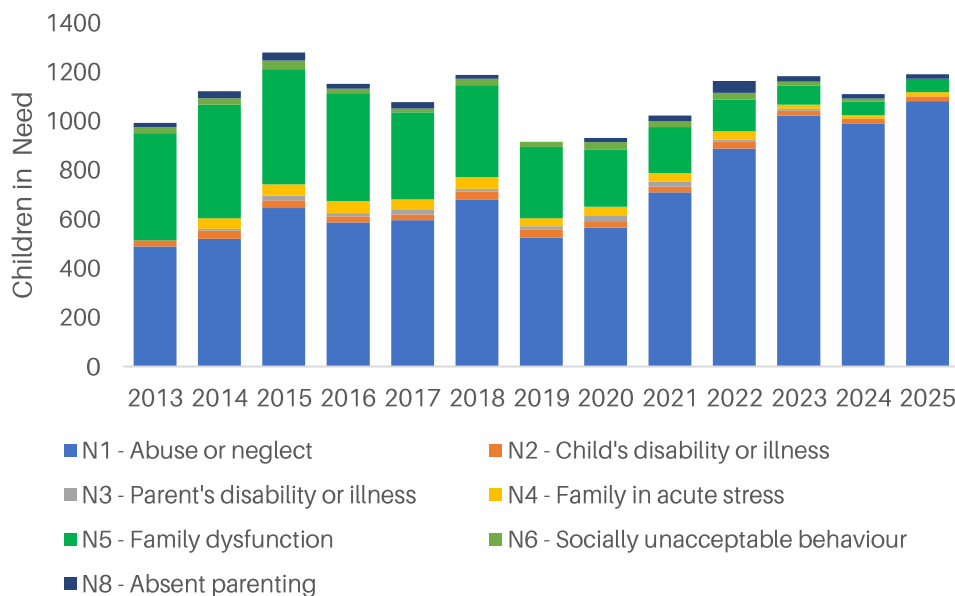
3. Baseline

CHILDREN IN NEED cont.

1,082 of the Children in Need in Halton in the year to March 2025, were registered as a child in need due to reason N1 Abuse or Neglect – the most severe reason for a child to be in need. This represents 90% of all Children in Need.

Not only has the number of children that are in need due to abuse or neglect increased dramatically over the last decade, but the proportion of cases that are classified as N1 have significantly increased. In previous years, it was much more common for cases to involve reason N5, Family Dysfunction, than current figures show.

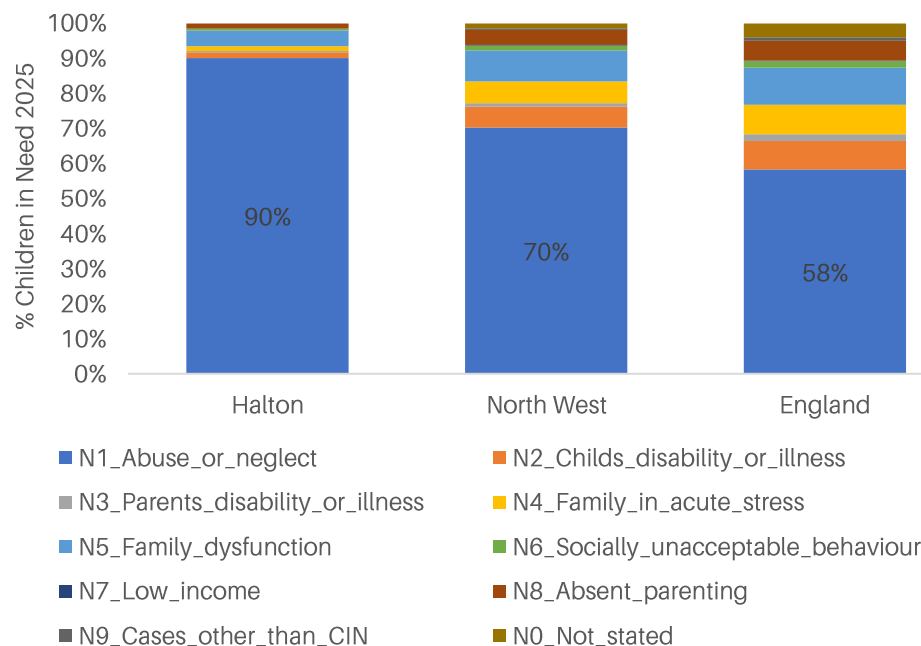
Figure 3.13 Halton Children in Need by Reason (2013-2025)



Source: DfE

When comparing this data to regional and national averages, the difference in primary type of need is significant. The proportion of Children in Need cases that involve abuse or neglect far outweigh what is seen in the North West and England, and there are much lower proportions of all other type of need.

Figure 3.14 Children in Need by Primary Type of Need (2025)



Source: DfE

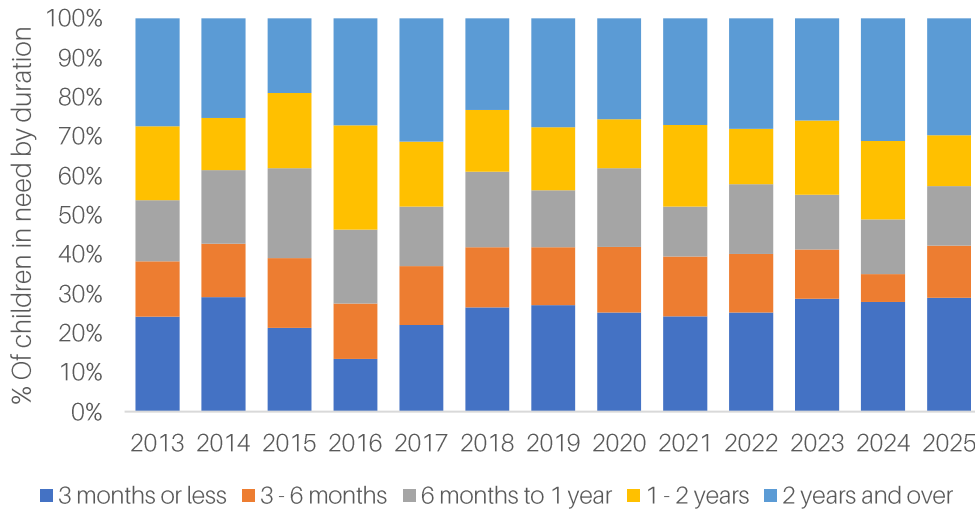
Furthermore, 4.2% of all children in Halton were registered as a Child in Need in the year to March 2025. This has increased from 3.6% of children in 2021. Over this period, there has been a consistently higher proportion of Children in Need in Halton than regional and national averages. In 2025, this was 3.7% of children in the North West and 3.2% of all children across England.

3. Baseline

CHILDREN IN NEED cont.

In 2025, nearly a 3rd of Children in Need cases were dealt with quickly (29% within 3 months or less). However, nearly a 3rd of cases took over 2 years to be dealt with. This is due to risking complexity and nationally recognised challenges in social work. The number of cases lasting more than 2 years has grown by 112 (46%) since 2015. Meanwhile, the number of cases between 3 months and 2 years is decreasing. This suggests that if an issue is not resolved early, there is potential for it to become a persistent area of need.

Figure 3.15 Halton Children in Need by Duration of Case (2013-2025)

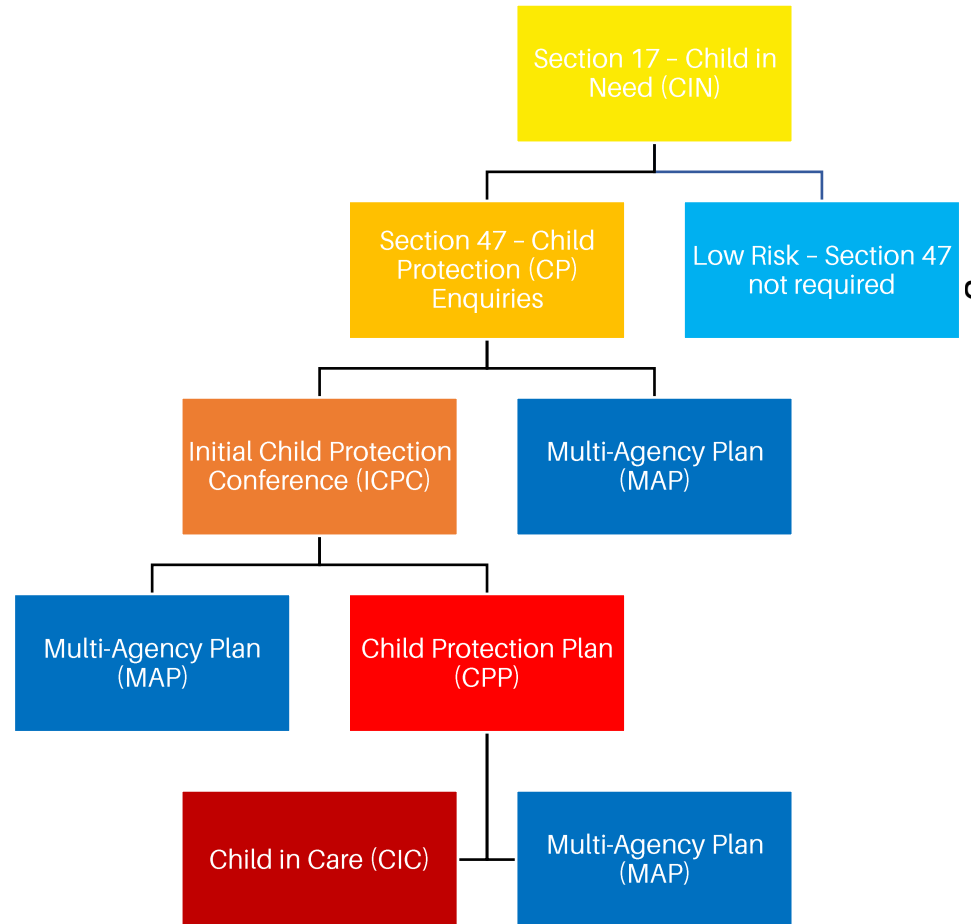


Source: DfE

CHILD IN NEED PATHWAY

The diagram below sets out the pathway through Children's Services once a child is identified as a Child in Need under Section 17.

Figure 3.16 Pathway Through Children's Services



3. Baseline

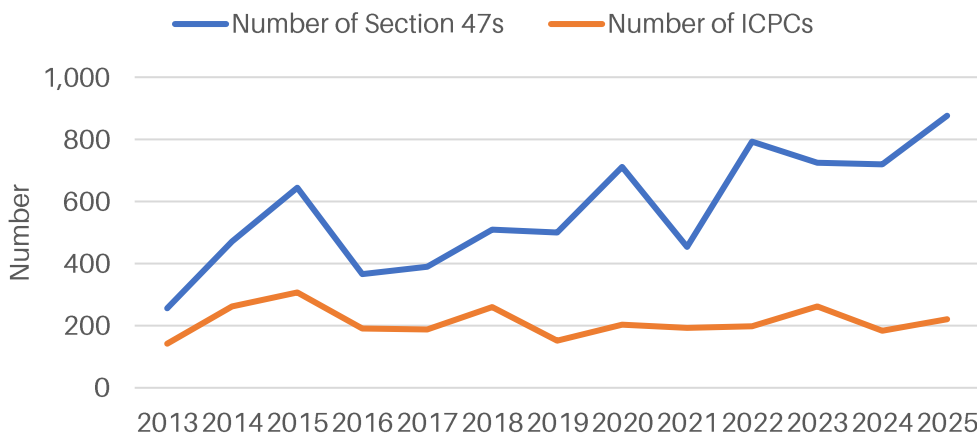
CHILD IN NEED PATHWAYS cont.

Section 47's and ICPC's

A Section 47 enquiry occurs after a Child in Need is identified of being at significant risk of harm. This triggers Children's Social Care to undertake enquiries to assess the risk. In 2025, there were 876 Section 47's. This has generally been following an increasing trend. There were 230 more Section 47's in 2025 compared to 2024 (36% increase). However, there was a spike in 2015. Compared to 2016, there were 510 more Section 47s, and increase of 139%.

If a Section 47 enquiry confirms that there is a significant risk of harm, there will then be an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC). This brings together all key professionals and the family to consider whether a child needs a Child Protection Plan. In 2025, there were 221 ICPC's. This is 25% of Section 47 enquires. Over the last decade, the trend in the number of ICPCs has remained fairly stable. Therefore, while Section 47's are increasing, the proportion of these enquiries that result in ICPCs is reducing. For example, in 2016 51% of Section 47's became ICPCs.

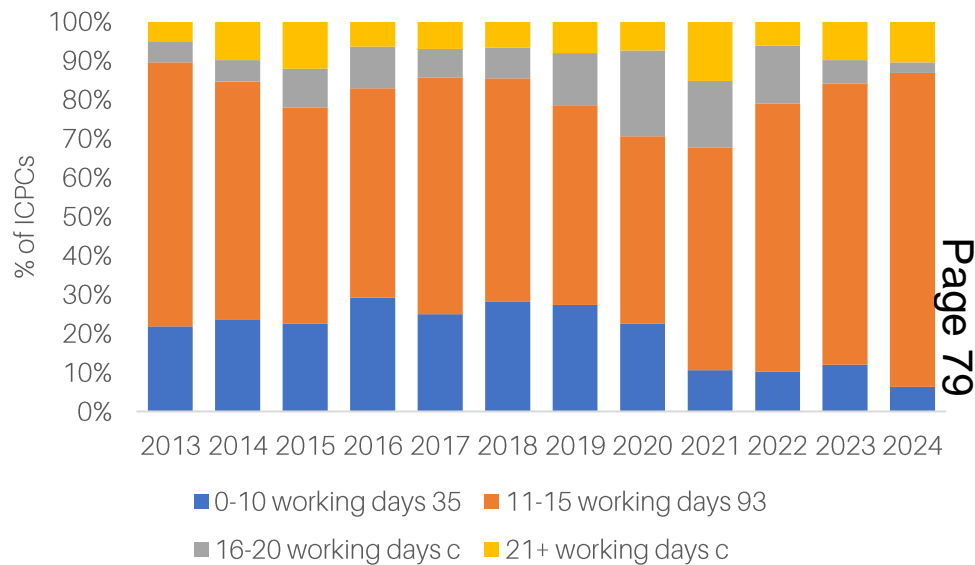
Figure 3.17 Halton Section 47's and ICPC's (2013-2025)



Source: DfE

Section 47 enquiries and ICPC's are taking longer in the last 4 years than they have done in the years prior. The average duration between the start of an S47 and ICPC has increased from 12 to 14 days. In 2025, only 6% of ICPCs were dealt within 0-10 working days. Over 10% took over 21 working days.

Figure 3.18 Duration of ICPCs



Source: DfE

3. Baseline

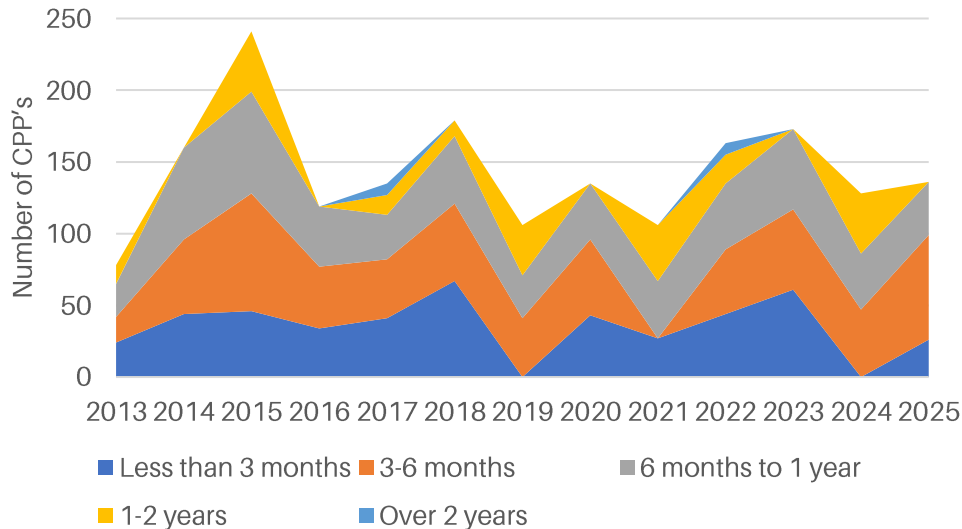
CHILD IN NEED PATHWAYS cont.

Child Protection Plans

If the threshold for significant harm is met, ICPC's will result in the recommendation of a Child Protection Plan (CPP). This involves agreeing actions for parents, professionals and the child, assigning responsibilities of each agency and setting timescales for review and follow up.

In 2025, there were 153 children with CPP's. This is a decrease of 88 since 2015 (-37%). However, 2015 was a year where there was a significant spike. The number of children with CPP's has fluctuated over the last years. There has been a decrease since 2022 / 2023. Of these, the majority (65%) last less than 6 months, with very few lasting over 1 year.

Figure 3.19 Halton Child Protection Plans (2013-2025)



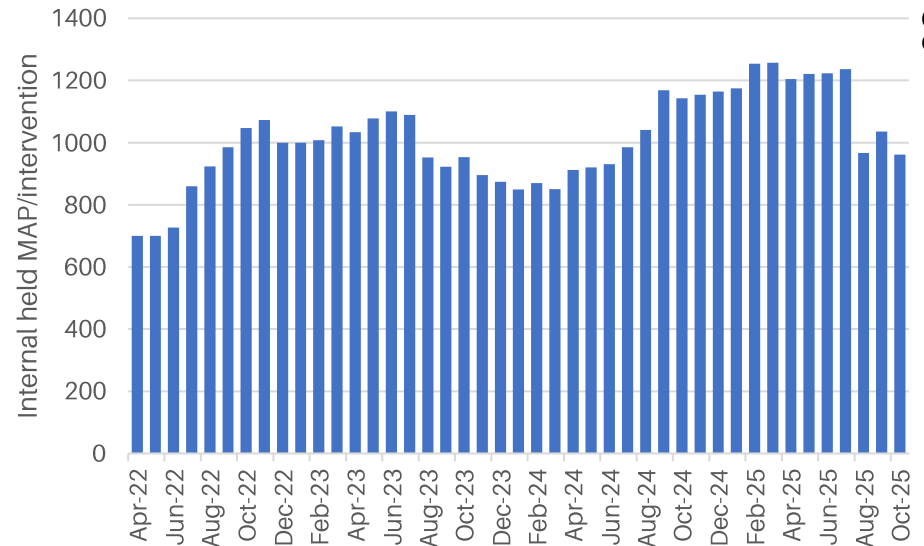
Source: DfE

Multi-Agency Plans

Multi-Agency Plans (MAPs) can be recommended in cases where a Child in Need is identified as being at lower risk of significant harm. This plan supports the child's development and wellbeing, and addresses needs early before they escalate into serious harm. The plan will coordinate services from education, health, social care and other agencies and is led by a social worker.

As of October 2025, there were 962 internally held MAPs/interventions. This dropped below 1,000 in August 2025 for the first time in over a year, since which the number had been steadily increasing. Number of MAPS/interventions is higher than the number of CINCP cases open because children can be on multiple plans and some short-term interventions may not be tied to a formal CIN case.

Figure 3.20 Halton Internal Held MAP/Intervention



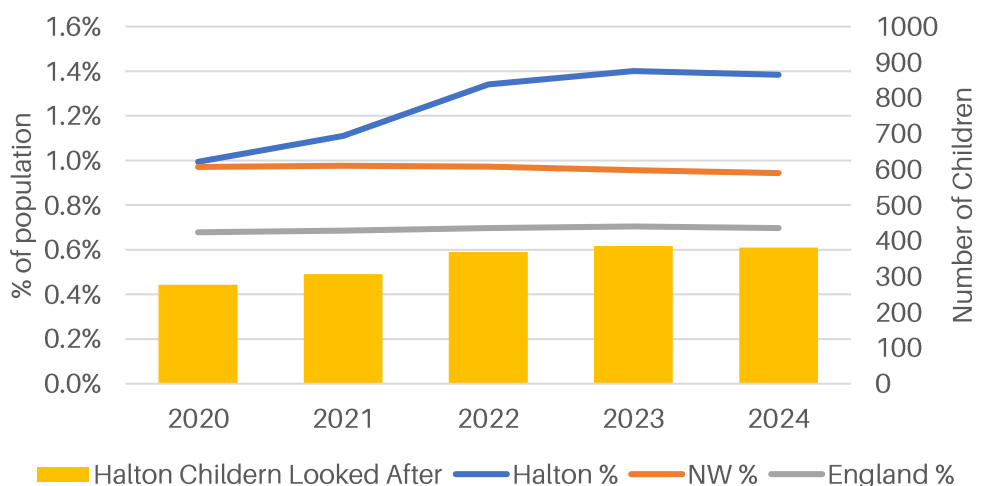
Source: HBC

3. Baseline

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

Most recent figures for 2024 show that there are 381 children looked after in Halton. This is equivalent to 1.4% of the population. This is higher than regional and national averages, there less than 1% of the population are Children Looked After.

Figure 3.21 Children Looked After in Halton (2020-2024)



Source: DfE

There were 26 more Children Looked After in Halton in 2024 than in 2020. This represents growth of 38% and has been increasing year-on-year.

Age of Children Looked After

39% of the Children Looked After in Halton in 2024 were aged 10-15 (147 children). This is in line with regional and national averages. 17% of children were aged 1-4, 20% aged 5-9 and 19% 16+. The age profile for Children Looked After has remained mostly unchanged over a 5 year period.

Reason for Being a Child Looked After

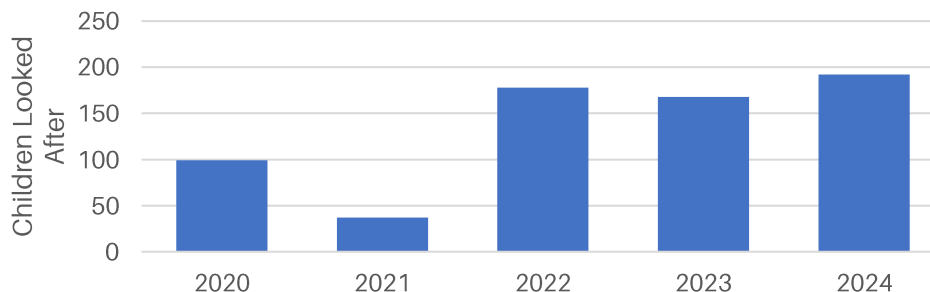
72% of the Children Looked after in Halton in 2024 were being looked after due to abuse or neglect (274 children). Whilst this is below regional averages, it is above the national average of 66%. 50 children (13%) were being looked after due to family dysfunction, 20 due to acute family stress (5%), 25 due to absent parenting (7%) and 6 due to socially unacceptable behaviour (2%). 6 children were being looked after due to either the child's disability or parental illness/disability.

Location of Care

80% of Children Looked After were placed 20 miles or less from home and 56 were placed further than this. However, as Halton is a small local authority, this could still mean that children are placed outside of borough even if they are within the 20 mile range.

We know that at least 188 Children Looked After (49%) were placed within the local authority boundary, 20 miles or less from home, and we know that 115 children (30%) were placed outside of the local authority boundary but still within 20 miles or less from home. We also know that 56 children (15%) were placed outside of local authority boundaries more than 20 miles from home. For some children distance was not recorded. However, we know that 192 children (50%) were placed outside of Halton in 2024. This exceeds the national average of 45%.

Figure 3.22 Children Looked After Placed Outside of Halton (2020-2024)

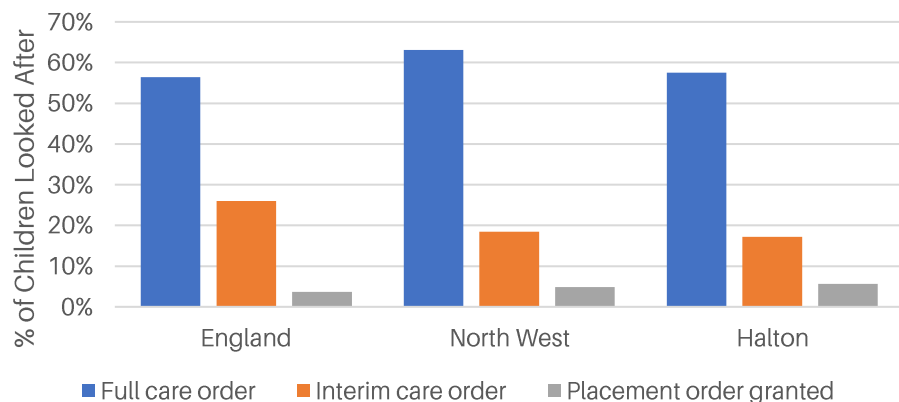


3. Baseline

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER cont.

In 2024, 215 Children Looked After in Halton were placed under a Full Care Order (56%), 99 children were placed under an Interim Care Order (26%) and 14 children had a Placement Order Granted (4%). Though slightly higher than the national average, a lower proportion of Children Looked After were placed under Full Care Orders than in the North West.

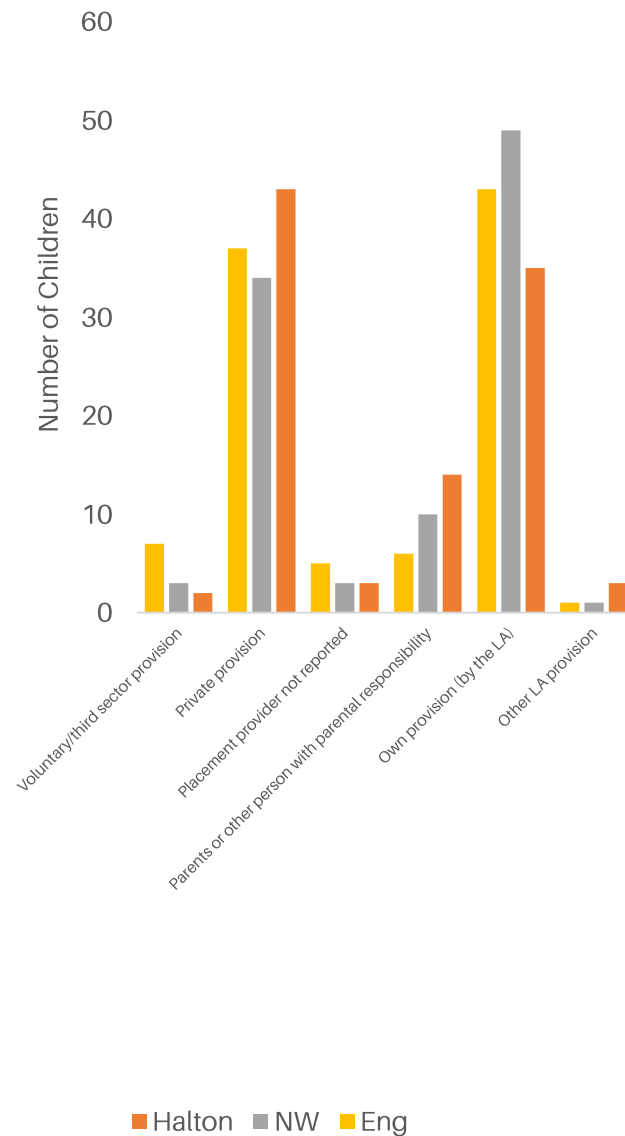
Figure 3.23 Children Looked After by Level of Care (2024)



Source: DfE

43% of Children Looked After were placed in private provision in 2024 (165 children). This is higher than the regional and national average. Halton also has much lower local authority provision than regional and national averages, providing for just 35% of Children Looked After. 14% of children were placed with parents or another person with parental responsibility which is higher than average. 11 children were placed in other local authority provision, and 7 children were placed in voluntary/3rd sector provision. In comparison, in 2020 35% of children were placed in private provision in Halton (96 children) and 50% were placed in the local authority's own provision (138 children). This is an increase of 69 children being placed in privately provided care within 5 years.

Figure 3.24 Children Looked After by Provider (2024)



3. Baseline

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER cont.

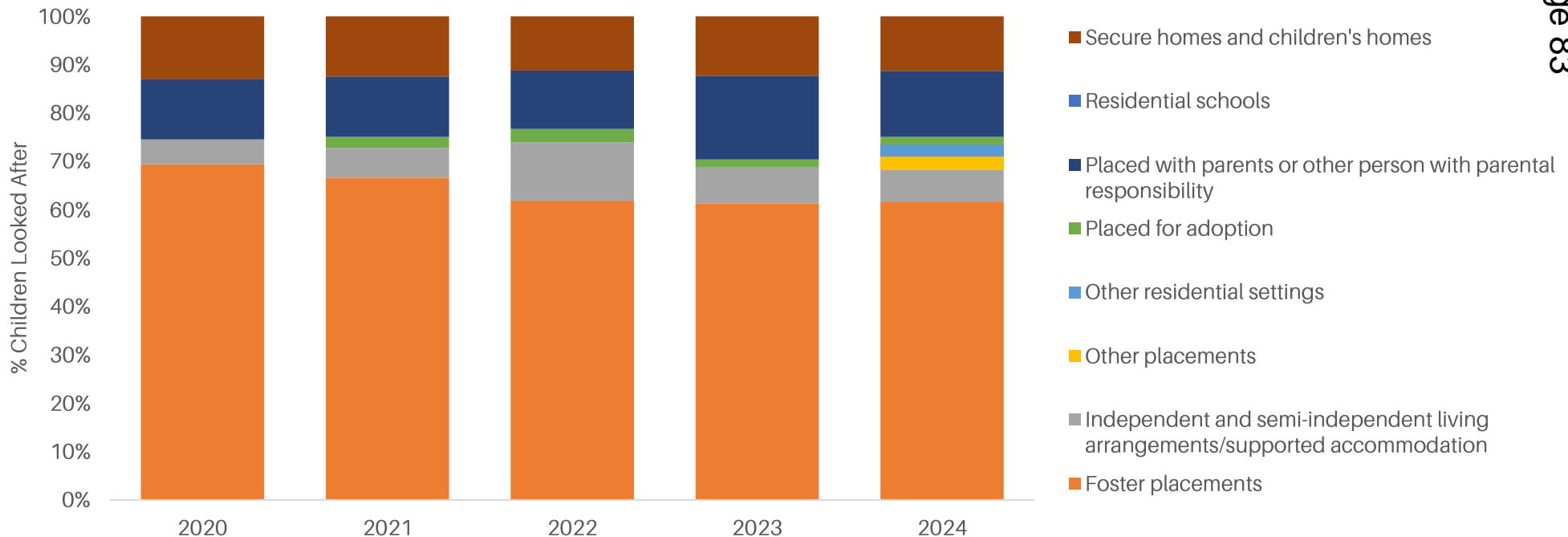
Figure 3.25 shows the proportion of Children Looked After by type of placement.

In 2024, 235 children in Halton were placed in foster care (62%). This is lower than the regional and national average (66% and 67% respectively). The proportion of Children Looked After going into foster care in Halton has been decreasing since 2020. 53 children (14%) were placed with parents or another person with parental responsibility.

43 children were placed in secure homes and children's homes (11%). This is higher than the regional and national averages of 10%. Only 6 children were placed for adoption (2%). 25 children were placed in independent and semi-independent living arrangements (7%). 11 children were placed in other placements (3%) and 9 children were placed in other residential settings (2%).

6% of children looked after were unaccompanied asylum seeker children. This is below the national average.

Figure 3.25 Halton Children Looked After by Type of Placement



3. Baseline

BASELINE DEMAND FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN HALTON

The table below outlines all of the key measures that assess the current demand for Children's Services in Halton.

Over a 10-year period, referrals to Children's Services have increased by 73%. This has only translated into a 2% increase in the number of Children in Need.

However, there has been an 84% increase in the number of children that are in need due to the most serious reason of abuse and neglect. This has resulted in a 139% increase in Section 47 enquiries. The increase in ICPCs and CPPs is lower but significant.

1.3% of children in Halton are currently Children Looked After. This has grown by 38% in 5 years. In the same period, there has been a 94% increase in the number of children placed outside of Halton, a 72% increase in children placed in private care provision and a 2% decrease in children placed in local authority provision. Whilst foster placements increasing by 25% is positive, this is more to do with an increase in Children Looked After rather than a wider use of fostering, as the number of children placed in secure homes and children's homes has also increased by 23%.

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Table 3.1 Summary of Baseline Demand for Children's Services in Halton

	Current No.	Year	% of Children in Halton	Trend	Trend Years
Referrals	1717	2025	5.8%	73%	2016-2025
Children in Need	1201	2025	4.1%	2%	2016-2025
Child in Need Due to N1 - Abuse or Neglect	1082	2025	3.7%	84%	2016-2025
Section 47	876	2025	3.0%	139%	2016-2025
ICPC	221	2025	0.8%	16%	2016-2025
CPP	153	2025	0.5%	7%	2016-2025
Children Looked After	381	2024	1.3%	38%	2020-2024
Children Placed Outside of Halton	192	2024	0.7%	94%	2020-2024
Children with Full Care Order	215	2024	0.7%	13%	2020-2024
Children Placed in Private Provision	165	2024	0.6%	72%	2020-2024
Children Placed in LA Provision	135	2024	0.5%	-2%	2020-2024
Foster Placements	235	2024	0.8%	25%	2020-2024
Children Placed in Secure Homes & Children's Home	43	2024	0.1%	23%	2020-2024

4. Service Requirements

4. Supply & Demand

INTRODUCTION

This section considers the existing supply of children's services and accommodation including a review and mapping of service spaces, identifying number, type, location, size, age and quality of space. It also considers the key issues or service delivery challenges, and costs associated with space provision.

We then consider the demand drivers for future services including assessment of population growth and identify potential gaps in current service assets to meet future needs and highlighting of priorities.

Finally, this section identifies service requirements and informed by stakeholder engagement.

EXISTING CHILDREN'S SERVICES ASSETS IN HALTON

The following map illustrates the existing Children's Services assets used by Halton Borough Council (HBC). The details of these are as follows:

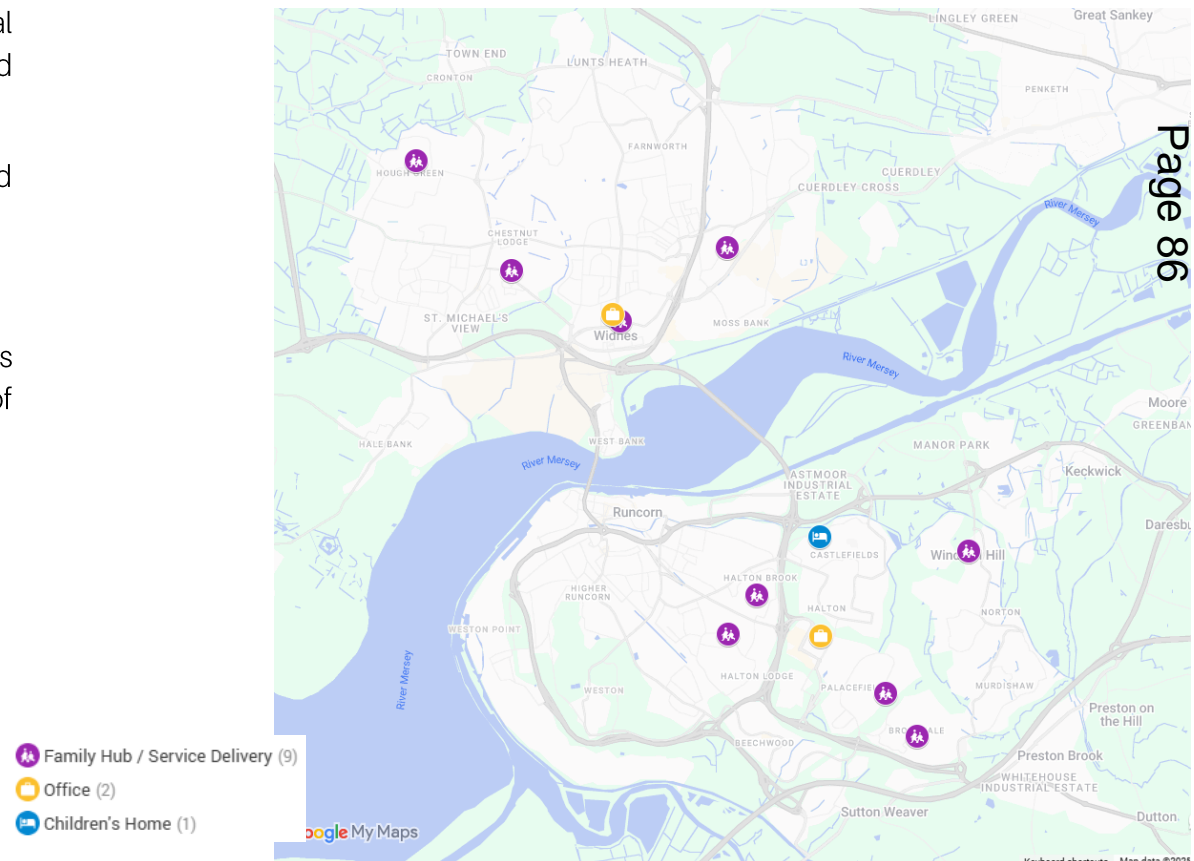
Runcorn

- Rutland House
- Brookvale Family Hub
- Halton Brook Family Hub
- Halton Lodge Family Hub
- Windmill Hill Family Hub
- Glendale Centre
- Inglefield Children's Home

Widnes

- Municipal Building
- Ditton Family Hub/Ditton Library
- Kingsway Family Hub
- Warrington Road Family Hub
- Upton Family Hub

Figure 4.1 Map of Existing Children's Services Assets in Halton



4. Service Requirements

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OFFICE SPACE

Table 4.1 Overview of Children's Services Office Space: Rutland House

Rutland House	
Type	Office Building
Size	1,177sqm of Children's Services office floorspace
Location	Located in the centre of Runcorn, connected to Runcorn Shopping City. Co-located with Halton Direct Link, Halton Lea Library, and Runcorn Police Station.
Age & Quality	Built in the 1970s. The building is of poor quality externally, surrounded by several vacant and derelict buildings. Internally, the building is of average quality. Whilst the space is acceptable for use as office space, the décor is outdated and there have been issues reported with temperature and lifts.
Ownership	Long lease to Aubrey Weis/Sun Alliance until December 2094
Description	Rutland House is the main Council office building located in Runcorn, spread across 4 floors. The building is the base for several teams alongside Children's Services, including external organisations. Rutland House is almost entirely restricted for public access aside from a conference room.
Children's Services	CIC & Care Leavers; Fostering; Placement Team; Safeguarding; Virtual School; Early Years & School Improvement; Admissions & Capital; SEN & Education Welfare; Commissioning; 14-19 Teams; Policy & Performance; Admin; CINCP.
Other Services	JR Levins Solicitors; NHS England; HM Courts & Tribunal
Workstations (Children's Services)	<u>1st Floor East Wing</u> = 83 <u>2nd Floor East Wing</u> = 76 (including 4 x Heads of Service office; 2 x Directors office) <u>3rd Floor West Wing</u> = 73 (including: Managers office (4)) Total = 232
Meeting / Breakout Rooms	Family Facing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground Floor - 1 boardroom style meeting room used for family conferences Council Only: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st Floor East Wing - 1 meeting room (6); 1 breakout area • 3rd Floor West Wing - 2 meeting rooms (8 & 4); 1 breakout area
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free parking • Kitchen in each wing • Lift • Located by Runcorn Shopping City with access to amenities

4. Service Requirements

COMMUNITY OFFICE SPACE

As well as office space for Children's Services in Rutland House and the Municipal Building. There is a significant amount of office space based in the Family Hubs. Table 4.5 sets out the size of office floorspace and number of desks in each Hub.

Table 4.5 Office Floorspace & Desks in the Community

Community Office Space	Desks	Office (sqm)
Brookvale Family Hub	20	77
Halton Brook Family Hub	13	30
Halton Lodge Family Hub	24	77
Windmill Hill Family Hub	6	23
Kingsway Family Hub	35	266
Warrington Road Family Hub	16	74
Ditton Family Hub	20	94
Upton Family Hub	2	-
Glendale Centre	25	134



4. Service Requirements

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OFFICE SPACE SWOT

Table 4.6 Children's Services Office Space – Strengths & Weaknesses

	Rutland House	Municipal Building	Community Office Space
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good location in the centre of Runcorn with access to the shopping centre and good parking. • Co-location of most Children's Services teams and big open plan floorspace is beneficial for collaborative working. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good quality building with plenty of parking. • Central location within walking distance to shops and the community. • The floor used by Children's Services co-located multi-agency teams that work with ICART/DAT. • The building is 24/7 so out of hours staff can always access. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of different good quality office spaces available in buildings across Runcorn and Widnes. • Windmill Hill Family Hub: office space decorated by volunteers at local company. • Upton Family Hub: utilises the school receptionist by covering a small portion of the wage.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a severe lack of meeting rooms, rooms for private conversations, comfortable breakout spaces, and training rooms. E.g. the Education team struggle to find space to host confidential meetings with professionals such as Ofsted. Teams often travel to the stadium for meetings which feel counterproductive when they are already all based in an office building. • When teams need more desk space they have to go through the Asset Management Group with a business plan and this can be a lengthy process. • Having most workers based on one side of the bridge can be a problem. • No male toilet on the 3rd floor. • More appropriate breastfeeding room required. • Some staff are unhappy with the quality of the building, as well as complaints about adequate equipment and heating. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The floor is often fully utilised. A desk rota is used but this is still not enough. • Lots of lockers that aren't used and spaces taken up for storage that could be better utilised. • Used to be a café in the building which has now gone and vending machines are empty. • Staff working here would like breakout areas with comfortable seating, and a quiet area. • Meeting rooms on ground floor are used for important meetings such as child protection meetings. These are bookable but get booked far in advance. Would be happy to use other rooms in the community if they were free of charge. These meeting rooms are also not family friendly and can be too corporate for the sensitive situations that are taking place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most offices in Hubs are for hybrid working but some are rarely full. However, some such as Ditton Family Hub & Kingsway Family Hub, are verging on full capacity and do not currently have the capacity to integrate changes through FFP. • A key issue is staff not being aware of the office space available to them, not knowing whether desks will be free and there can be issues with staff feeling unwelcome if they do not usually work in Hubs. • Parking issues in Kingsway Family Hub.

4. Service Requirements

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OFFICE SPACE SWOT

Table 4.6 Children's Services Office Space – Opportunities & Threats

	Rutland House	Municipal Building	Community Office Space
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vacant offices on the ground floor formerly used by solicitors are vacant and discussions are in progress for opening these as meeting rooms. • Using the library for meeting rooms. • More use of community spaces for both desk working and meetings / training. This will begin happening as the FFP pilot begins in January. • Some teams would love to be making more use of community facilities but currently do not have the awareness on what is available, who can use them and for what types of activities/meetings. • Make the office space more flexible beneficial to staff wellbeing e.g. standing desks, screens, appropriate chairs etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no opportunities in relation to this building as it is scheduled to no longer be used by Children's Services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for creating additional office space in Ditton Family Hub, Kingsway Family Hub, Warrington Road Family Hub. If one building were to be invested in to create more office space then Warrington Road Family Hub would be the preference as it has the most potential. • Develop an easy to use and accessible desk booking system and ensure that all staff utilise it and stick to bookings.
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference room on the ground floor that is used for multi-agency conferences is completely unsuitable, is cause for confidentiality concerns and a new solution is required. Due to the serious nature of these conferences, Hubs are often not appropriate. • Whilst there is a big push to move more Children's Services work into the community, Rutland House has a long lease so will still need to be utilised. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The space in Municipal Building will be closing, meaning new space will be needed for ICART/DAT. This space will still need to allow colocation with multi-agency partners needed to run the service effectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the transition to FFP, there will be a bigger focus on community-based working and expansion of some teams, meaning more desk space / better utilisation of space will be required in Hubs. • Creating more office space in Hubs threatens to harm the balance between office and service delivery and risks diluting teams. • Glendale Centre: in the process of moving the family support team into the offices. When they arrive there will not be enough desk space for everyone.

4. Service Requirements

CHILDREN'S SERVICES DELIVERY SPACE

The majority of the service delivery that takes place in Halton outside of homes, takes place in the 8 Family Hubs and in the Glendale Centre. The table below provides an overview of each building in Halton used for Children's Services delivery.

	Overview
Brookvale Family Hub	Family Hub with office space, an old school hall used for health clinics/ groupwork, operational café space operated 2 mornings a week by the community, a community planting space, room for midwives, boardroom style meeting room, large creche and some family time rooms.
Halton Brook Family Hub	Small centre located next to a Church. Small amount of service delivery takes place here. It has a training room that is sometimes used by a youth club and for staff meetings, a former creche used for young people, a small contact room and some office space for the parent team. This is not a fully fledged Hub because it doesn't have a reception. The building is closed when all staff are on visits.
Halton Lodge Family Hub	Family Hub that opens into a large, mostly unused atrium. Staff office space and several meeting rooms, as well as a medical room, sensory room, large creche, baby room and conference style meeting room. Private nursery also located inside the building.
Windmill Hill Family Hub	Smaller of the Runcorn Family Hubs with a large playroom used for group sessions, family time / 1:1 rooms and some office space. Often a preference for family time due to it being more private. Part of the building is listed and sits next to a primary school and a church which provides a triangle of social support for the community.
Kingsway Family Hub	Connected to Widnes Library with the Family Hub upstairs. There is a main hall used for group activities and a multi-purpose creche space that is also used for activities such as baby massage. There are also a few options for 1:1 sessions, and a small sensory room. There is 1 room upstairs that is available to hire for training/meetings. Good amount of office space. Rooms in the library can be used and there is a private nursery in the building.
Warrington Road Family Hub	Family Hub connected to a primary school that has several good-sized rooms for different types of group work, as well as a large kitchen set up for family cooking sessions. There are also several service delivery rooms, a creche and an outdoor space used for forest school, as well as a midwifery room and office space.
Ditton Family Hub	Provides Locality Team with a significant amount of office space as well as several multi-purpose rooms used for 1:1 and group work for all ages e.g. baby massage, family time, parenting courses, speech and language. There is a large youth centre, meeting rooms and a creche. There are 2 community centre rooms that Children's Services can book.
Upton Family Hub	Extension onto a primary school providing a creche, a large sensory room, a medical room and a meeting room often used for courses and adult learning, plus a small office space. Serves the community more on the outskirts of Widnes. Host some large events using outdoor area.
Glendale Centre	Recently taken up by the Edge of Care team to support older children and their families. Mostly closed to the public as service delivery taking place here can be sensitive and carries a high-risk level. Entry from the public is by appointment only aside from 2 community groups per week which have taken place there historically. This is the only building that is purely dedicated to supporting older children. Key features include 3 rooms and a large kitchen that can be used by families, as well as office space.

4. Service Requirements

CHILDREN'S SERVICE DELIVERY SPACE cont.

The table below sets out the different types of spaces that are currently available within each Children's Services delivery building.

Key spaces required in Family Hubs:

- **Welcome & Access:** for a single point of access, engagement and triage
- **Advice & Assessment:** private / small consultation room for 1:1 support, assessment & casework e.g. Early Help assessment; Health Visitor appointment
- **Multi-Agency Working Space**
- **Group & Programme Delivery:** for preventative & targeted interventions e.g. flexible group rooms; youth groups; perinatal groups. With moveable furniture &

storage.

- **Early Years & Play:** for child development, attachment & observation e.g. stay & play; sensory play; baby-friendly spaces
- **Health & Wellbeing:** e.g. Health Visitor; infant feeding; mental health practitioner
- **Youth & Adolescent:** informal rooms for emotional wellbeing support; 1:1 youth work; group sessions
- **Family & Relationship Support:** family mediation; parenting conflict support etc.
- **Community & Voluntary Sector:** bookable rooms for voluntary groups
- **Staff & Operational Spaces**

Table 4.7 Children's Services Delivery Space

	Rooms for Available for Family Time	Family Time Rooms (sqm)	Activity Space (sqm)	Activity Space Type	Creche (sqm)	Health Rooms
Brookvale Family Hub	5	87	188	Play Room	83	1
Halton Brook Family Hub	1	9	41	Play Area	-	-
Halton Lodge Family Hub	5	106	52	Open space not currently in use	92	1
Windmill Hill Family Hub	1	32	100	Games Room	-	-
Kingsway Family Hub	2	21	94	Main Hall	45	1
Warrington Road Family Hub	3	105	129	Training Room with sink; 'Daisy' used for playgroups	45	1
Ditton Family Hub	3	46	181	Youth Centre Additional bookable rooms in the building not included in sqft	33	-
Upton Family Hub	2	45	-	-	48	1
Glendale Centre	Glendale has 3 rooms that can be used for families (59.6sqm) but the spaces here are exclusively for use of the Edge of Care team.					

4. Service Requirements

CHILDREN'S SERVICES DELIVERY SPACE cont.



4. Service Requirements

CHILDREN'S SERVICES DELIVERY SPACE SWOT

Table 4.8 Children's Services Delivery Space - SWOT

Children's Services Delivery Space	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 different spaces out in the community that cover all of the requirements for a good Family Hub service delivery. These buildings are good quality, well-maintained and generally very welcoming and family-friendly spaces. • The Hubs/Centres are well-located across Halton with 4 in Widnes and 5 in Runcorn allowing access for families across the borough. • All units have some form of outside space, with some being great sizes, well-maintained and well-used by the community. • These buildings provide plenty of space for use by the community and often integrate with primary schools, nurseys and local churches to create a good sense of integration with the community. • Whilst some Hubs are smaller and may not look as family friendly as others, these can often be preferred for Family Time sessions as they can feel like more discreet buildings. • Midwifery/Health Visitor rooms are very beneficial to the community as there is not a birthing hospital in Halton. • Glendale Centre provides a great dedicated space for children using the Edge of Care service - it is dedicated to older children and can be well-controlled to deal with the riskier nature of this type of service delivery.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A key issue raised about service delivery in Halton is that there feels like there is a lack of space to delivery Family Time sessions. Families usually want to arrange these after school which means that a lot of the space is empty during the day but fully booked after school. However, there also appears to be a lack of knowledge of all of the different spaces that are available across the borough, what they can be used for and how to book them. They also struggle having lots of children here at this time as they all need feeding. • There is a lack of space that is suitable for older children. • Issues in some buildings (Kingsway Family Hub & Halton Brook Family Hub) with having to walk through spaces to access other rooms which means they are underutilised for groupwork. • Glendale Centre still has 2 external community groups run from there every week which can cause issues when having Edge of Care children in the space at the same time.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a clear digital map of all of the spaces available in Family Hubs, what they can be used for, and develop an easy to use and accessible booking system than can be used across Children's Services. • Increase the opening hours of Hubs to allow for an extra hour of Family Time sessions after school hours.
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the move to the new FFP structure that will see more staff working in the community, there is a risk that Hubs shift too far towards being office buildings rather than spaces for the community. It will be important to maintain this as the transition takes place. • Hubs are still working to try and remove their reputation as a Children's Centre and ensure that the wider community know that it is open to all parents and children of all ages. • The current working culture across Children's Services is a threat to integrating a more widespread use of service delivery across all available assets. There are concerns about staff feeling unwelcome in some buildings and not understanding what spaces they can or cannot use.

4. Service Requirements

CHILDREN'S HOMES / CARE LEAVER HOMES

There is only 1 active residential home for children in Halton, the details of which are set out below:

Inglefield Children's Home

Inglefield has been open for 51 years and is a Children's Home that provides respite to families caring for children with complex behaviour and disabilities. They offer overnight stay but is not for permanent residence.

There is capacity for up to 4 children to stay overnight. At the moment they provide for 21 children but this can go up to 25 at one time. Young people cannot stay for more than 75 days in a year or they become a Looked After Child. There are 6 bedrooms but only 4 can be used at a time due to the size of the living space. They are open overnight 5 days per week from Wednesday to Monday.

There is currently a waiting list in Halton for short breaks so they can only offer each child 1 or 2 nights a month to accommodate as many children as possible. The demand has drastically increased in recent years, in part believed to be due to an increased awareness of the service.

The building has a 6 bedrooms, a living room, kitchen, garden, staff offices, play area, therapy room, sensory room and games room. Bedrooms and bathrooms are adapted for children with different needs, including a safe space room.

Pre-Covid they used to charge for out of borough children to use the service. This was generating income to pay for extra staff and overtime. There is an opportunity to start doing this again and charge ~£800 a night.

Inglefield Children's Home



Issues and Opportunities with Assets for Children Looked After in Halton

- The major issue in Halton is that there are no residential care facilities so all children that require this must go out of borough, away from the area they are familiar with, and at a high cost to the Council.
- The Council currently have 1 trainer flat and ~4 supported accommodation flats for Care Leavers but generally this care is outsourced privately and/or out of borough.
- There is the opportunity to expand Inglefield into Lavendar House next door, which is currently used by a private provider as a Care Leavers building, P3, who are due to move into a new premises.
- Several schemes are undergoing feasibility and planning to introduce local authority provision of residential care for Children Looked After in Halton.

4. Service Requirements

NON-CHILDREN'S SERVICES ASSETS

In addition to the Children's Services assets reviewed above, as part of the study, site visits also took place at 3 additional Council sites to understand if there are any opportunities available at these sites for use by Children's Services, either for office or service delivery space. The details of these 2 sites have been set out below.

Site	Description	Current Use by Children's Services	Opportunities
Murdishaw Community Centre	A small Runcorn based community centre, located next door to The Bridge School. Has a large playroom space that is regularly booked for evening activities and training. To the side of the playroom is a small office, activity room and communal kitchen. The Growth Company were previously using this space to train 40 students. The hope is to get funding to continue using this space for training. There is a large Main Hall that is booked in daytime and evenings for e.g. Slimming World, kids parties, Santa's grotto etc. It costs £14.40 per hour to hire the Main Hall. There is a good size meeting room at the front.	The space used to be used more extensively by Children's Services but this has reduced considerably since Children's have had their own facilities.	The only opportunity would be to convert the space off the play area into office space, but a use for this has already been identified. There is good space available to book for group activities / larger meetings if required but this would be charged.
Castlefields Community Centre	A large, modern community centre located in the Village Square in Runcorn. There are 2 meeting rooms that can open up into one large room, an office for the Manager and a small office that is let out to a tenant. There is a community café and laptops available for community use. There is a large Main Hall that is booked for activities such as sports classes and theatre groups. An additional large meeting/activity room is located at the back of the building available to hire for £11.70 an hour, including an additional small office that is let to an IT training company.	No specific current use by Children's Services. A charge is applied if Children's Services wish to use any of the space.	No opportunities identified. Some good quality spaces available to book for group activities if needed.
Old Police Station	A complex building with a variety of different spaces. The majority of the building is made up of small meeting rooms that are well used by therapists. These are leased at £180 a month. The Community Hub team office is too big for its purpose with only 1 person generally using it at a time. There is a good sized training suite which is used ad hoc. This is advertised for lease at £750 a month. The old Courtroom is now a conference room which is let out for training, NHS, fitness groups etc. This is more of a commercial building.	No current use by Children's Services.	No definitive opportunities identified. There is some office space available but basing some Children's Services desk-based work from here would not have a great deal of strategic fit as it is more of a commercial building than a community base.

4. Service Requirements

ADDITIONAL SERVICE REQUIREMENTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Families First Partnership (FFP)

Following the implantation of the national FFP programme, Halton will be delivering a community-based Family Help model, hosted in Rutland House with the Multi-Disciplinary Team working together from both Rutland House and within community-based buildings.

Heads of Service are preparing spaces in both Rutland House and within community-based buildings. There will be approximately 13-15 staff in the pilot team, that will test the new ways of working before wider rollout.

Decommissioning of the Municipal Building

It was announced in December 2025 that, as part of HBC's long term accommodation strategy, the Municipal Building will be decommissioned and office space vacated by 2027. This is following a review of the sustainability and suitability of the site, and to explore opportunities the site could offer as part of the wider Kingsway Quarter development and Widnes Town Centre Regeneration Plan. Work will now take place to understand current working arrangements in order to design plans and spaces for more efficient working. No decisions have currently been made about staff relocation.

The Bridge School

The Bridge School is a Key Stage 3 and 4 Pupil Referral Unit that serves Halton and is within the remit of Children's Services. It provides alternative education for secondary-aged students who are unable to attend mainstream school for a range of reasons, including behavioural challenges or risk of exclusion. The current facility is located within an industrial estate, and the space has been outgrown. Potential options to explore include surplus school places in Runcorn allowing space to be offered up for The Bridge School to use facilities or find an existing asset that could be use. There has been suggestion that space in Ditton Family Hub may be available and could be tested for feasibility. The requirement would be 10 classrooms for 100 children.

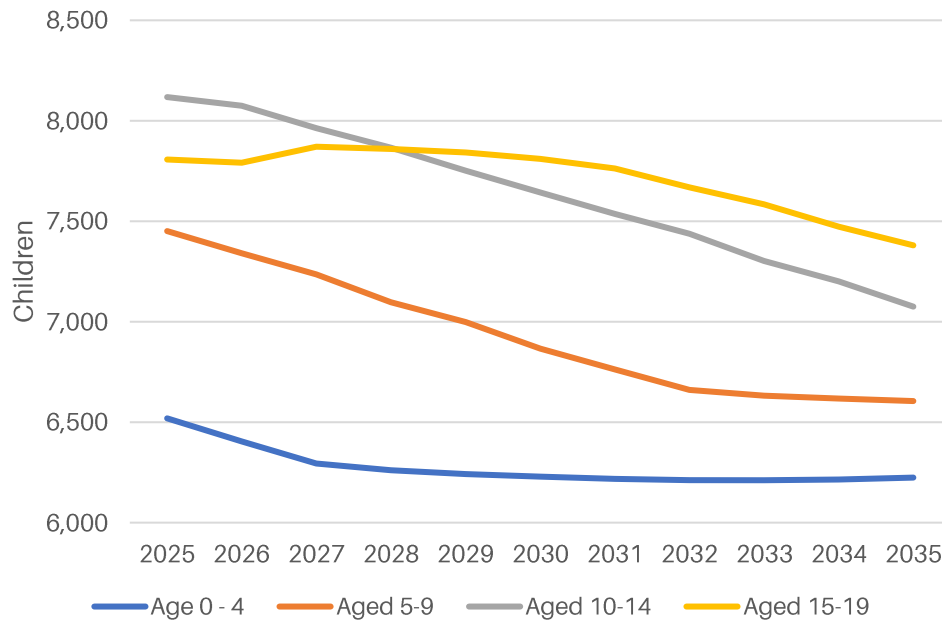
4. Service Requirements

CHILD POPULATION PROJECTIONS

The ONS projects that by 2035 there will be 27,284 children in Halton aged 15-19. This is a projected 9% decrease from the projections for 2025.

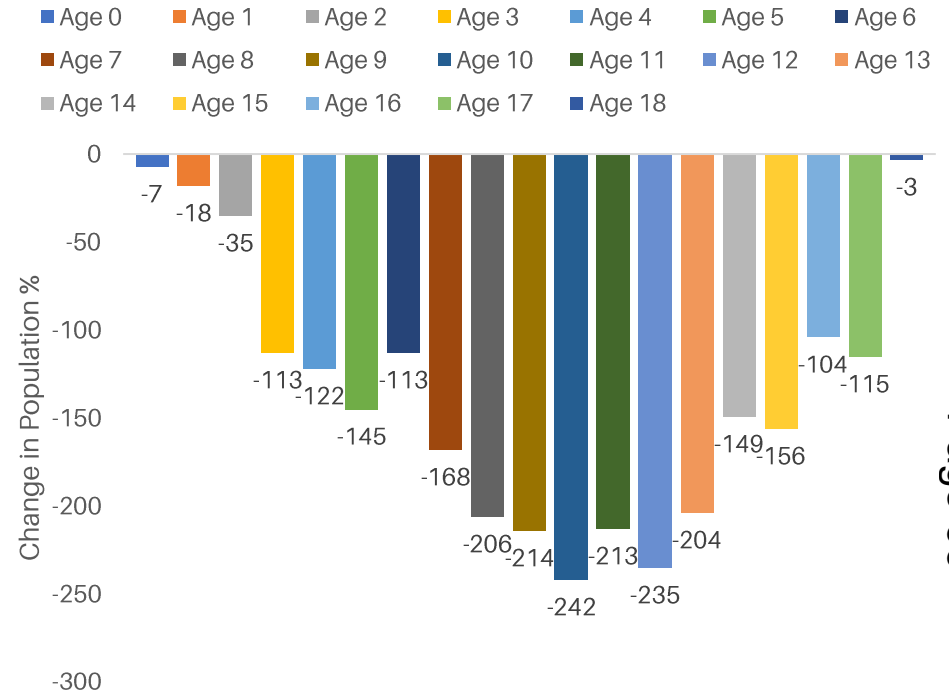
The largest proportion of children will be made up of older children aged 15-19 (7,380 children; 27%), with the size of age groups decreasing with age. Only 23% of children will be aged 0-4 (6,224 children) meaning there will be 1,156 more older teenagers than babies / toddlers. The key shift will be the number of 15-19-year-olds exceeding 10-14-year-olds after 2028.

Figure 4.1 Halton Child Population Projections (2025-2035)



Source: ONS

Figure 4.2 Projected Change in Halton Population by Age (2025-2035)



Source: ONS

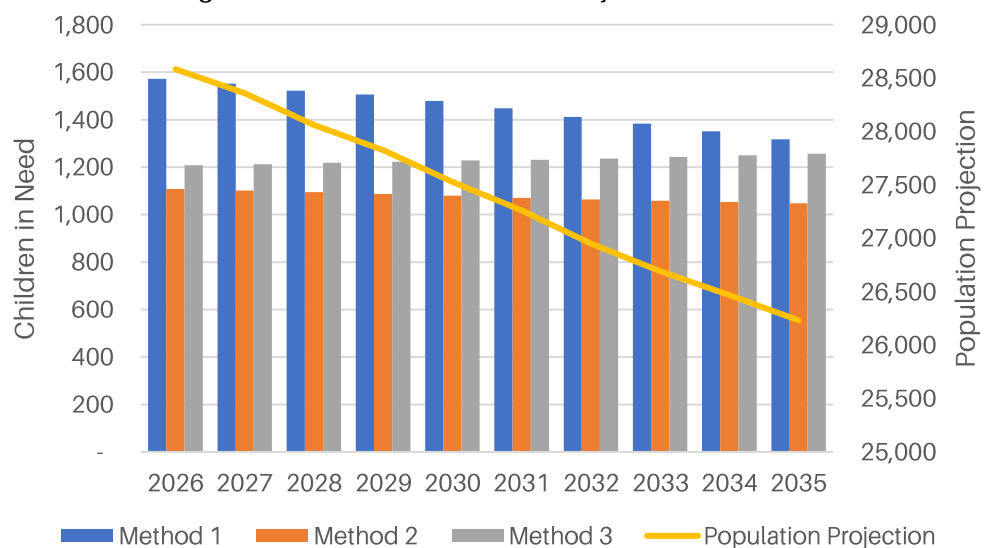
All age groups under 18 are projected to decrease in Halton between 2025 and 2035. The largest decrease is expected to be age 10, where there is estimated to be 242 less children (-15%). All ages between 7 and 13 are projected to decrease by more than 10%. Decreases in age 0-2 and age 18 are projected to be marginal.

4. Service Requirements

PROJECTED DEMAND - CHILDREN IN NEED

To estimate the current demand for Children’s Services in Halton, 3 different projection methods have been used to test different growth scenarios. All of these scenarios include the Halton child population projections. These projections are set out in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3 Halton Child in Need Projections 2025-2035



Source: DfE; Icen Analysis

Method 1 – High Demand

This projection method estimates that in 2035 there will be 1,317 Children in Need in Halton. This is an increase of 116 children (10%) on current figures.

This method also estimates that there will be 528 children undergoing a Section 47, 248 children on a CPP at any point in the year and 161 children undergoing an ICPC.

Assumptions:

- Method 1 projections are based on the national linear forecast of the % of children in England that were classified as Children in Need between 2013-2025, against Halton’s population projections to 2035.

Method 2 – Low Demand

This projection method estimates that in 2035 there will be 1,048 Children in Need in Halton. This would be a decrease in 153 children from 2025, a reduction of 13%.

This method also estimates that there will be 832 children undergoing a Section 47, 318 children on a CPP at any point in the year and 150 children undergoing an ICPC.

Assumptions:

- Method 2 projections are based on a linear forecast of the % of children in Halton that were classified as Children in Need between 2013-2025, against population projections to 2035.

Method 3 – Medium Demand

The 3rd method estimates that in 2035, 1,257 will be Children in Need in Halton. This represents a 5% increase on 2025, equivalent to an additional 56 children.

This method also estimates that there will be 1,417 undergoing a Section 47, 547 children on a CPP at any point in the year and 281 children undergoing an ICPC.

Assumptions:

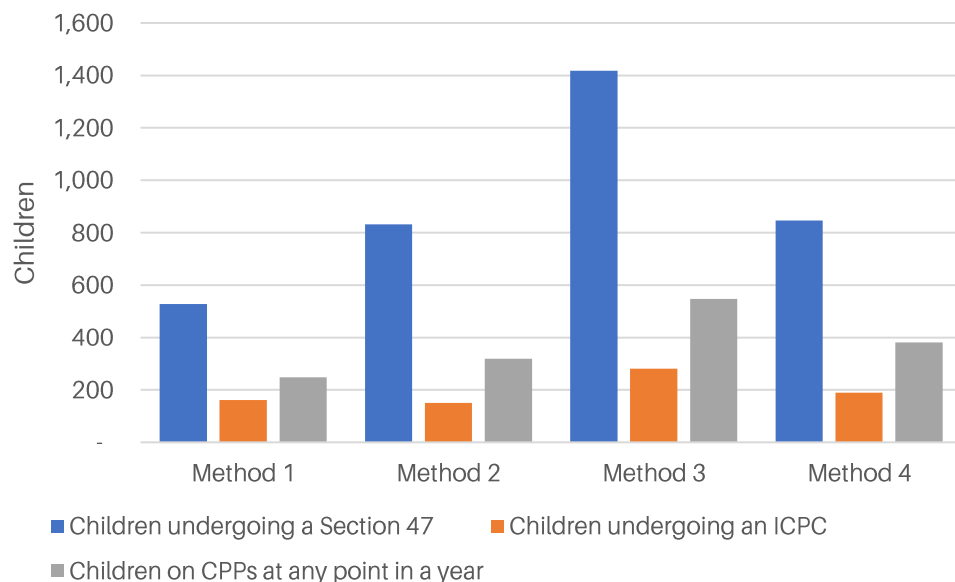
- Method 3 projections are based on year-on-year growth of Children in Need in Halton between 2013 and 2025, applied to Halton’s population projections.

4. Service Requirements

PROJECTED DEMAND - CHILDREN IN NEED

Figure 4.4 below sets out the projections demand for Section 47 enquiries, ICPC's and CPP's in 2035 based on Methods 1-3 and an additional Method 4.

Figure 4.4 Projected Demand – Children undergoing Section 47s, ICPCs and CPPs 2035

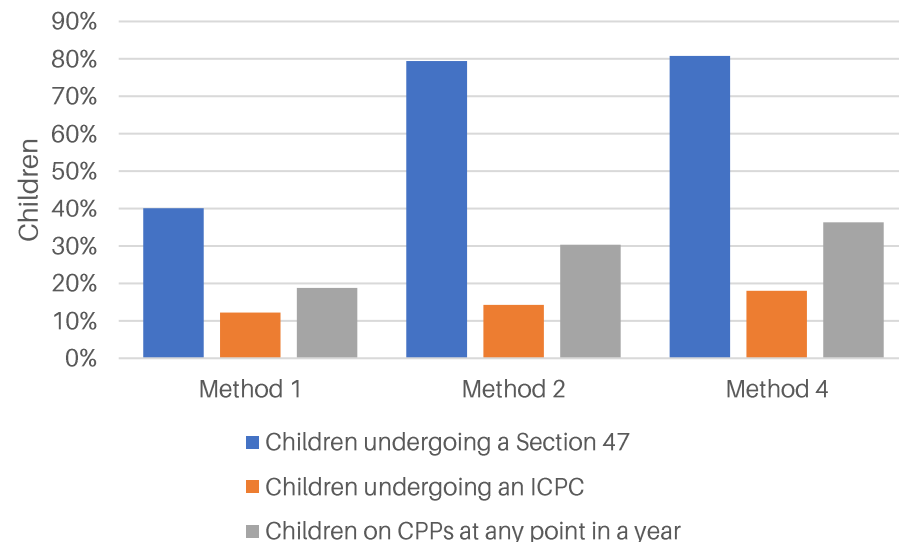


Source: DfE; Icen Analysis

Method 4 Assumptions:

- Method 4 has been based on the Method 2 Child in Need linear forecast, but estimated children undergoing ICPC, Section 47 and CPPs has been estimated based on the linear forecast of the % of Children in Need going down each pathway.

Figure 4.5 Projected Demand for Children's Services Pathways by % of Children in Need (2035)



Source: DfE; Icen Analysis

Figure 4.5 shows these projections as a % of projected Children in Need. Method 3 can be discounted due to estimates showing a higher number of children undergoing a Section 47 enquiry than projected total of Children in Need.

This show that method 2 and 3 show a similar proportion of Children in Need undergoing a Section 47 at 79% and 81% respectively. Method 1 shows a decrease to 41%. This is compared to current figures of 59%.

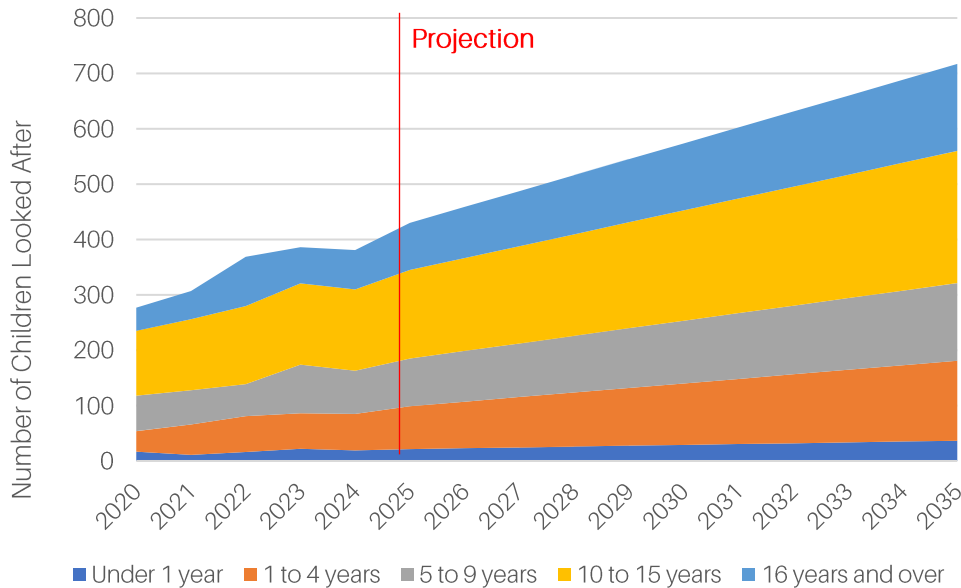
The projections methods show a range of 36-19% of cases escalating to a CPP and 18-12% escalating to ICPCs in 2035. This is compared to 28% and 18% in 2025.

4. Service Requirements

PROJECTED DEMAND - CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

To project the number of Children Looked After in Halton in 2035, linear extrapolation used on the number of Children Looked After, using 2020-2024 data. According to this forecast, the number of Children Looked After is estimated to increase by 88% to 717 children, an addition of 336 more children.

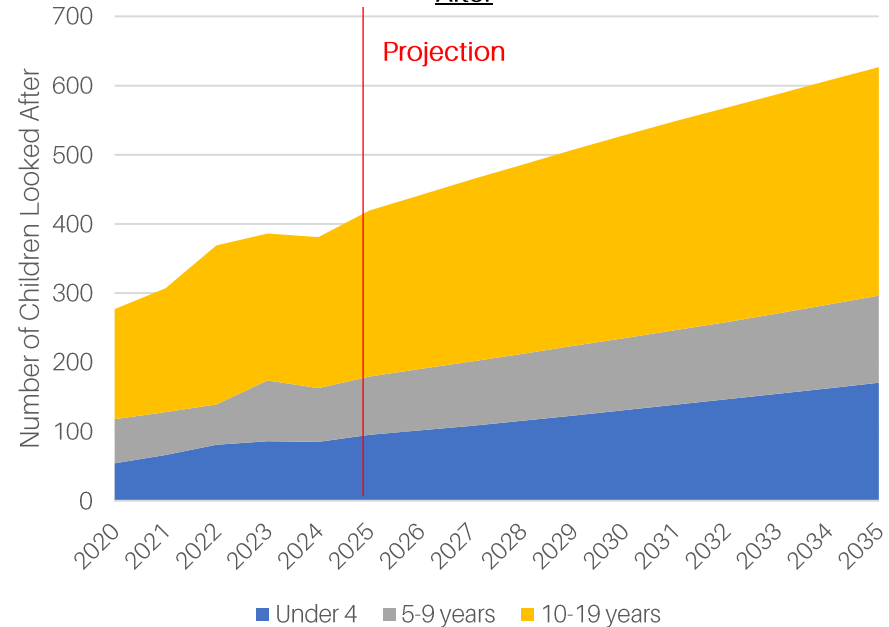
Figure 4.6 Linear Forecast for Children Looked After in Halton in 2035



Source: Icen analysis

By age, this predicts there will be 18 more children aged under 1 (+92%), 79 more children aged 1-4 (+119%), 62 more children aged 5-9 (+80%), 92 more children aged 10-15 (+62%) and 86 more children aged 16+ (+121%).

Figure 4.7 Linear Forecast by % Child Age Population that are being Looked After



Source: Icen analysis

This second method uses a linear extrapolation of the % of children by age band who are being looked after using 2020 and 2024 data.

In 2020, 0.9% of the child age population were being looked after. By 2024, this increased to 1.2%. Extrapolating forwards, this could increase to 2.6% of the child age population, but noting the population is due to decrease.

This would result in Children Looked After in Halton to increase to 627 children by 2035 - 246 more children and a 64% increase. This includes 86 more children under 4 (+101%), 48 more children aged 5-9 (+61%) and 112 more children aged 10-19 (+51%)

4. Service Requirements

PROJECTED DEMAND - CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

Figure 4.8 sets out the current demand for different types of placements for Children Looked After, compared with both projection methods. The table below sets out estimated gap between current and future demand.

The method using population based change estimates the highest need, including 267 foster placements (+14%) and 163 placed with parents or other person with parental responsibility (+213%). This also includes 55 children in secure homes or children's homes (12 more than currently) and 93 in independent and semi-independent living arrangements/supported accommodation (+68 children).

The second method estimates a need for 48 children to be placed in secure homes and children's homes, which is 5 more than were in 2025, and 81 children in independent and semi-independent living arrangements / supported accommodation (56 additional children). Foster placements are estimated to remain largely unchanged and 90 children place with parents or another person with parental responsibility.

Figure 4.8 Halton Projected Children Looked After by Placement Type in 2035

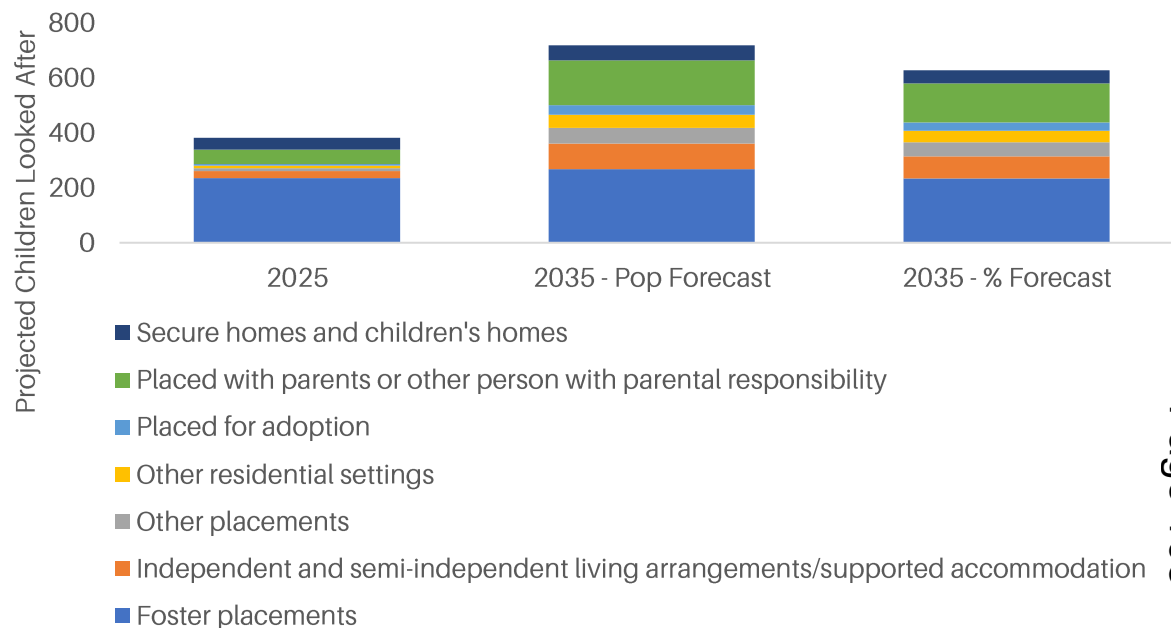


Table 4.1 Gap Analysis – Halton Children Looked After Projections

	Foster Placements	Independent And Semi-independent	Other Placements	Other Residential Settings	Placed For Adoption	Placed With Parents / Parental Responsibility	Secure Homes And Children's Homes	Total
2025	235	25	11	9	6	52	43	381
2035 - Pop based Change (No.)	32	68	47	38	28	111	12	336
2035 - Pop based Change (%)	14%	271%	427%	427%	472%	213%	27%	88%
2035 - % based Change (No.)	-1	56	40	32	24	90	5	246
2035 - % based Change (%)	-1%	224%	361%	361%	400%	174%	11%	64%

4. Service Requirements

OVERVIEW OF FUTURE SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

Overall, the key future service requirements that can be concluded from this study are:

- Demand for Children's Services is set to increase and assets will need to be expanded and adapted in order to cater to this demand.
- The introduction of the FFP programme will create more pressure on Family Hubs to have adequate desk space and good flexible working policies to support a higher volume of staff.
- More meeting rooms and breakout spaces are required for staff in Rutland House, as well as improved equipment including monitors, chairs etc.
- The conference room on the ground floor of Rutland House urgently requires upgrading and conference facilities needed in Widnes.
- Either additional space or a better utilisation of available space is required for Family Time sessions in Family Hubs.
- Spaces in the Hubs need to cater more for older children.

5. Space Provision Scenarios

5. Space Provision Scenarios

CURRENT FAMILY HUB OFFICE SPACE & POTENTIAL WITH MAXIMUM SPACE UTILISATION

The table below sets out the number of desks currently in each of the Family Hubs / Children's Centres in Halton and how many desks there are per sqm of office space. These desk numbers may be updated following an internal review.

With the transition to FFP, there will be greater emphasis on desk working in these buildings. This exercise has been used to understand the capacity of existing office space for desks.

According to Health & Safety Executive, the UK's national regulator for workplace health and safety, the lowest limit for desk space should be 4.6sqm. This is also recommended by other sources including BizSpace and Easy Offices as the

minimum for a high-density open plan layout.

The table sets out a high-level indication of how many desks could fit into the current office floorspace in these buildings if the minimum space requirement was followed.

The result of this analysis is that most of the buildings are already maximising desks in existing office space, aside from Kingsway Family Hub and Glendale Centre where there could be potential for more.

	Desks	Office (sqm)	Office Space per Desk (sqm)	Desks with Max. Utilisation	Change in Desks
Brookvale Family Hub	20	77.2	3.86	16	-4
Halton Brook Family Hub	13	29.8	2.29	6	-7
Halton Lodge Family Hub	24	76.5	3.19	16	-8
Windmill Hill Family Hub	6	6	3.85	5	-1
Kingsway Family Hub	35	265.9	7.6	57	+22
Warrington Road Family Hub	16	74	4.63	16	-
Ditton Family Hub	20	93.8	4.69	20	-
Upton Family Hub	2	Upton Family Hub is discounted due to there being a lack of demand/need for more desk space.			
Glendale Centre	25	134	5.36	29	+4

5. Space Provision Scenarios

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILY HUB OFFICE SPACE REPURPOSEMENT

The table below summarises potential opportunities to repurpose existing underutilised space in each Family Hub to create more office space and increase the number of desks. 4 of these buildings have some potential space that could be converted into office space.

There is a caveat that some of these figures may change following internal review. Some options may also be discounted if deemed not appropriate / feasible.

The table outlines the potential net additional space through the repurposing and how many additional desks this would create by following the minimum requirement of 1 desk per 4.6sqm.

	Opportunities for Repurposing to Office Space	Net Additional Office (sqm)	Total Desks (Expansion + Max. Utilisation)	Net Additional Desks
Brookvale Family Hub	No viable office repurposing opportunity.			-4
Halton Brook Family Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand larger room to create open plan with 2 small offices. Currently underutilised space. 	+37.9	14	+1
Halton Lodge Family Hub	No viable office repurposing opportunity.			-8
Windmill Hill Family Hub	No viable office repurposing opportunity.			-1
Kingsway Family Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Merge Managers Office and 2 smaller offices connected to Children's Centre Office to create more open plan. This would allow for better space utilisation. Exchange the Children's Centre Office with the Community team for larger office upstairs. 	+31.2	64	+29
Warrington Road Family Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Move the offices in Bluebell in Daisy/Daffodil and use Bluebell for service delivery. Knock through former Headteachers Office and small Managers Office into Staff Office and Staff Room to create one large open plan office. 	+70.1	31	+15
Ditton Family Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knock through from the Main Office into the room next door that is currently used for external evening activities (or create a 'pack away' office) Convert the creche into office space. Convert meeting room to the side of the Youth Centre to office space. 	+152.4	53	+33
Glendale Centre	Glendale Centre is discounted from further changes as it is transitioning into a base for Edge of Care and Family Support. Desk space will be limited so hot desking policy will be in place.			

5. Space Provision Scenarios

CURRENT FAMILY HUB OFFICE SPACE & POTENTIAL WITH MAXIMUM SPACE UTILISATION

Another way to increase and improve access to desks in buildings in the community is to implement good hot desking practice. This refers to there being a good awareness of all facilities and an accurate desk booking system that is adhered to by all staff. Feedback from stakeholder engagement strongly suggested that awareness of desk spaces, as well as a culture of feeling unwelcome in certain spaces, or being unsure when desks can be used, was a major barrier to transition into more work taking place at desks in these buildings.

This high-level analysis is based on an assumed hybrid working policy of an average of 2.5 office days per week per staff member and an 80% utilisation rate of desk space.

This shows that by investing in good hot desking practice can have a significant impact on the amount of staff that can be supported without having to increase the number of desks.

The table also sets out the impact on net additional staff supported to work in these buildings by undertaking the repurposing works in the previous table alongside investing in good hot desking practice.

	Current Desks	Staff Supported with Good Hot Desking Practice	Potential Desks	Potential Staff Supported with Good Hot Desking Practice	Net Additional Staff Supported with Good Hot Desking	Potential Net Additional Staff Supported with Good Hot Desking
Brookvale Family Hub	20	32	16	26	+12	+6
Halton Brook Family Hub	13	21	14	22	+8	+9
Halton Lodge Family Hub	24	38	16	26	+14	+2
Windmill Hill Family Hub	6	10	5	8	+4	+2
Kingsway Family Hub	35	56	64	102	+21	+67
Warrington Road Family Hub	16	26	31	50	+10	+34
Ditton Family Hub	20	32	20	85	+12	+65
Upton Family Hub	2	3	N/A	N/A	+1	N/A
Glendale Centre	25	40	29	46	+15	+21

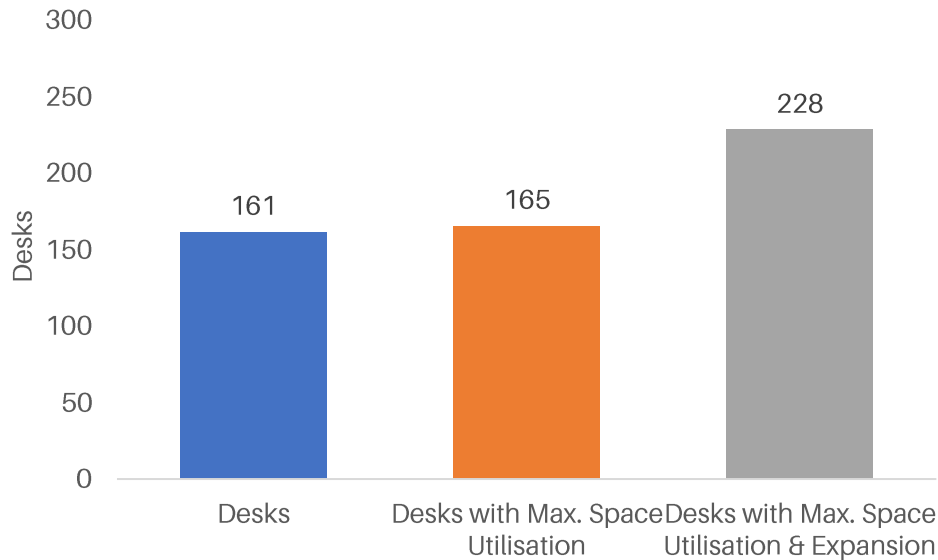
5. Space Provision Scenarios

OVERVIEW OF OFFICE POTENTIAL IN FAMILY HUBS

Overall, there is potential with maximum space utilisation of increasing desks by just 4 desks, implying that the current layout of desks in existing office space has pretty much reached full potential.

There is a maximum total opportunity to increase desks to 228 with space maximisation and repurposing projects. This creates 67 additional desks (+47%).

Potential Number of Desks in Existing Family Hubs



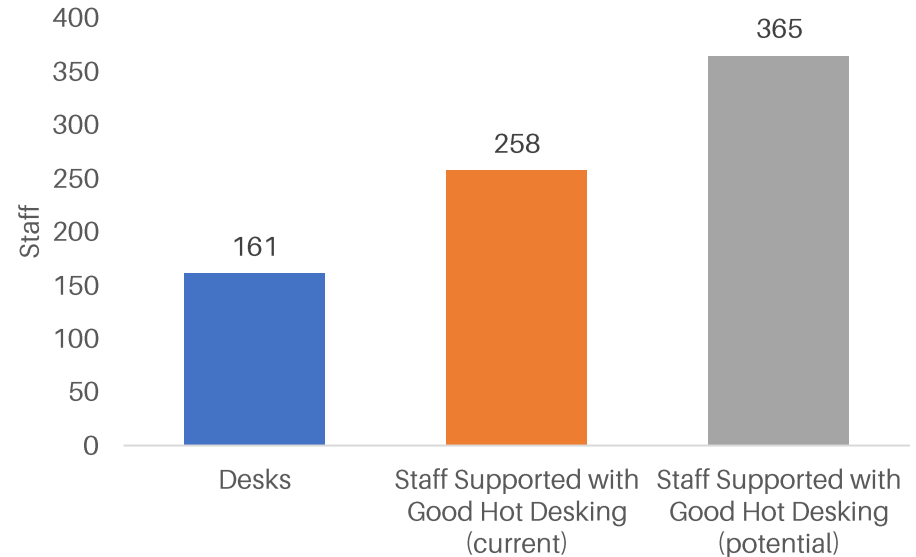
Source: Icen Analysis

There is the potential to support 258 staff per week in Hub office space with a hybrid work policy and good hot desking practice. This is 97 more staff than desks.

With space maximisation and repurposing projects, an additional 203 staff could be supported per week.

Kingsway Family Hub has the most potential for increasing desks with better space utilisation, Ditton Family Hub, Kingsway Family Hub and Warrington Road Family Hub have the most potential for space expansion. However, final estimates on available space is under internal review.

Potential Staff Supported in Existing Family Hubs



Source: Icen Analysis

5. Space Provision Scenarios

FAMILY TIME SESSIONS WITH EXTENDED OPENING HOURS

One of the key service requirements that resulted from this study is more space for Family Time sessions that cater to a range of ages. The analysis below tests how many sessions could be held in the existing Family Time rooms per week, based on the assumption of them being used for just 1 daytime session and 2 afterschool sessions. This is then tested against opening each building for 1 additional hour.

This is a key issue that arose during engagement, that most sessions need to take place after school, but Hubs close around 5-6pm.

Potential to repurpose existing space into additional Family Time rooms is also highlighted where an opportunity was identified. These opportunities could be discounted or altered during stakeholder engagement if deemed not feasible or appropriate.

	Rooms for Available for Family Time	Est. Family Time Sessions per Week*	Est. Family Time Sessions per Week with Extended Opening Hours*	Net Additional Family Time Sessions per Week with Extended Hours	Potential for Additional Family Time Rooms
Brookvale Family Hub	5	75	100	+25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential to convert the external courtyard into additional space but unlikely to work for Family Time.
Halton Brook Family Hub	1	15	20	+5	No identified repurposing opportunities.
Halton Lodge Family Hub	5	75	100	+25	No identified repurposing opportunities.
Windmill Hill Family Hub	1	15	20	+5	No identified repurposing opportunities.
Kingsway Family Hub	2	30	40	+10	No identified repurposing opportunities.
Warrington Road Family Hub	3	45	60	+15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity to convert Training Kitchen into new space and if office was moved from Bluebell this space would become available. However, these would likely be used for group activities rather than Family time
Ditton Family Hub	3	45	60	+15	No identified repurposing opportunities.
Upton Family Hub	2	30	40	+10	No identified repurposing opportunities.

5. Space Provision Scenarios

OVERVIEW OF FAMILY TIME POTENTIAL IN EXISTING HUBS

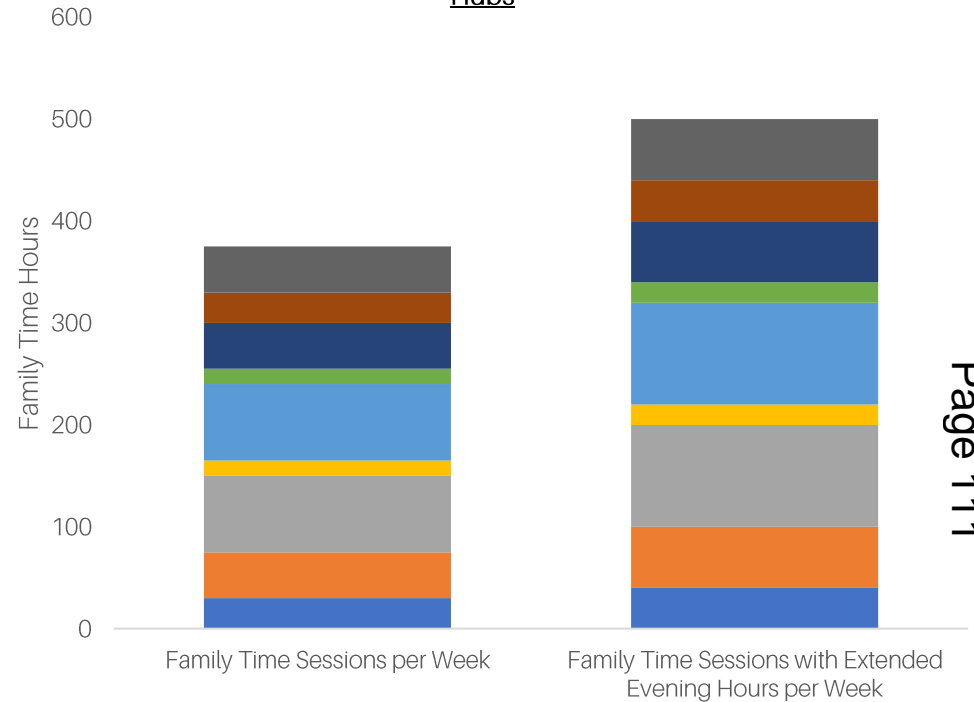
There are currently 25 rooms available across the community buildings for Family Time sessions. Based on 3 sessions held in each room per working day, this equates to 375 hours of Family Time per week.

The Family Time team currently carry out ~300 hours of contact per week. This suggests that there is already plenty of capacity in existing spaces to carry out all Family Time activities.

Therefore, with appropriate consideration to ensure that rooms are decorated to cater to different age ranges and needs, good awareness of rooms and a good booking system, the service should have enough rooms to meet current capacity.

There is potential to increase the number of hours that can be facilitated for Family Time per week in the existing Hubs by 33%. This result comes from just 1 additional evening hour per week. However, there are logistical issues that may make this difficult. Therefore, additional rooms would be needed to increase capacity. However, no viable repurposing opportunities have been identified, and additional capacity is unlikely to be required with improvements in awareness and booking systems.

Capacity for Expanded Family Time Sessions with Extended Opening Hours of Hubs



- Kingsway Family Hub
- Warrington Road Children's Centre
- Halton Lodge
- Halton Brook
- Brookvale Children's Centre
- Windmill Hill Children's Centre
- Ditton Community & Children's Centre
- Upton Children's Centre
- Glendale Centre

5. Space Provision Scenarios

HALTON PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2025-28

Following the development of the Halton Placement Sufficiency Strategy, work has been undertaken to establish a list of schemes that will be taken forward to create more bedspaces in residential care for Children Looked After that are owned by the Council. These have been summarised below. This includes care leavers accommodation and a Care Leavers Hub that would not provide bedspace.

Site	Capacity	HBC Estimated Capital Investment	Target Use	£ Per Week per placement	Online by	Stage	Milestones
Juno home 1- 14 Summer Lane	3 Beds	£0.0m	Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties/LD dual registered home (awaiting registration)	£5250 - £5750	May- 26 (pending registration)	Renovation, Partner led	Building work started. Registration Submitted
Juno home 2- Offer made on home in Widnes, awaiting acceptance	3 beds	£0.0m	TBD	£5250 - £5750	Proposed November 26	Purchase, Partner led	
Halton Home 1- to be in Widnes Likely purchase. Possible Development.	2/3 beds	£.550m for property acquisition, Stamp Duty (or equivalent tax), Valuation Fee, Survey Costs, Legal & Administrative Fees, Conveyancing Fees, Land Registry and search Fees. Additional costs- fire alarm, fixtures and fittings		£5250 - £5750			

5. Space Provision Scenarios

HALTON PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2025-28

Site	Capacity	HBC Estimated Capital Investment	Target Use	£ Per Week per placement	Online by	Stage
Rutland Street	3 Beds	£0.600m Cost of development and associated costs (as above)	Specialism to be decided	£5250 - £5750	Autumn 2028	Regen Concept
Appleton Village / Park House	3 Beds	£0.099m	Care Leaver Focus (16-18 years)	-	Spring 2026	Lease transfer/HBC owned property
18+ Supported Accommodation Development 1	10 Flats	£0.150m	Care Leaver Focus (16-18 years)	-	Autumn 2026	Lease transfer/RP property currently being used for another provision
18+ Supported Accommodation Development 2	10 Flats	£0.100m	Care Leaver focus (aged 18 plus)	-	Summer 2028	Concept Stage
Care Leavers Hub	4 rooms for direct work and staff office	£.250	Care Leaver Team	-	Unknown	Concept/stage

5. Space Provision Scenarios

SUMMARY

Whilst the child age population is projected to decrease, referrals and the need to assess cases is set to increase, and there is estimated to be more Children in Need in the borough. Those that are in need are likely to be of the most severe cases.

For this reason, it can be assumed that more Council resource is needed to support these cases for longer periods of time, and more children could become Children Looked After.

At the same time, implantation of the FFP and a greater focus on Early Help to reduce the severity of future Child in Need cases, increases the importances of the Family Hubs and an integrated workforce out in the community.

To achieve this, social workers will need to integrate into using desk space flexibly across the Family Hubs. The most cost-effective way to do this would be to implement good hot desking practice and a sound desk booking system alongside hybrid working. This also requires a significant culture change to ensure different teams across the service feel welcome in flexible spaces and good awareness of the desk space available.

There are also options identified to repurpose existing space into desk space in Family Hubs – particularly in Kingsway Family Hub, Ditton Family Hub and Warrington Road Family Hub.

The Council currently only has one owned accommodation facility for Children Looked After – Inglefield, and a couple of care leavers flat. This means the Council is facing high costs placing a large number of children in private accommodation and outside of the borough, which creates further issues in the future for these children as they become Care Leavers.

To solve this issue, a new local authority provision of accommodation for Children

Looked After will be required, on top of existing schemes identified through the Placement Sufficiency Strategy, this could be achieved through:

- Working with the Housing Regeneration Team to identify sites for constructing accommodation. They have a list of registered providers that would be willing to include accommodation for Children Looked After as part of their affordable home provision. The Regen team require a specific brochure that can be shared with RPs which sets out exactly the specifications needed. Engagement with Halton Housing Partnership would be beneficial to this study.
- Repurpose existing Council assets / purchasing assets and converting into Children's Homes / Care Leaver flats.
- The draft Housing Strategy has identified the potential for a grant for foster care to alter their homes to allow them to look after more children. This would be a relatively low cost way to work with existing foster carers, and allow more children to remain in the borough in a family setting. A similar grant scheme already exists for families living with disabilities. The Home Improvement Team have experience issuing the grant and the Property Team are able to oversee the conversions. Suggestion of a survey to existing foster carers to understand the interest in the scheme and a trial period.

6. Recommendations & Conclusions

6. Recommendations & Conclusions

INTRODUCTION

This section presents our recommendations and conclusions to the report. This is broken down into:

1. Service delivery and space utilisation
2. Children's Accommodation
3. Out of scope ideas for future

Here we also test out the potential costs of the interventions listed.

OPTIONS ASSESSMENT

The process to finalise the overall recommendations and conclusions has involved testing a comprehensive list of options for each Children's Services asset with key stakeholders, resulting in the selection of a preferred option for each. Preferred options may differ to those set out initially in Section 5: Space Provision Scenarios, as they may have evolved through stakeholder engagement discussions. All options are high-level ideas and would require further consultation, feasibility, design and QS costings. Each preferred option has then been fed into the overall capital ask.

COST ASSUMPTIONS

In this section we test the potential costs of various recommendations. This is a high-level indicative cost estimate based on benchmarks only are not QS costings based on architect designs. As such there is potential for considerable variance.

The table sets out the current average benchmarked costs associated with refurbishment and repurposing works. This suggests that on average refurbishment works range from £500/sqm for the most basic office fit-out, including modest refurb and minimal structural changes. This ranges up to £2,000+/sqm for a more bespoke fit-out that requires a stronger design focus.

It should be noted that these figures do not account for potentially higher costs associated with Local Authority procured works.

We have also included a contingency allowance of 25% on total costs.

The following sections test the potential costs associated with various recommendations.

Item	Cost benchmark (£/sqm)
Basic fit-out	£500-800
Mid-level fit-out	£800-1,200
High-spec / bespoke	£1,200-2,000+

Source: [Office Fit Out Costs Benchmarks 2023](#)

6. Recommendations & Conclusions

1. SERVICE DELIVERY AND SPACE UTILISATION

Family Hubs

This report highlights that demand will increase for use of family hubs, meeting rooms, and family time rooms; and also utilisation of the family hubs to accommodate greater office space and joint working across teams. To do this will require repurposing works, to convert some spaces for use as offices, as well as general refurbishment works to ensure family hubs are set up and capable of accommodating cross team working. This aims to maximise the use of the family hubs for service delivery.

Based on average costs of £2,000 per sqm (high-spec/ bespoke refurbishment accounting for structural changes to buildings with a premium for Council procurement) for capital works to repurpose existing family hubs to create an additional 384 sqm office space / conferencing facilities, delivering an additional 83 desk spaces, the cost would be **£1,023,080 million**. In addition, £600 per sqm (basic fit-out costs including modest refurbishment work (e.g. flooring, decoration etc.) would be allocated for general refurbishment works on existing office space, or to make the family hubs more accessible to workers. This would cost a further **£363,540** taking the total capital ask to refurbish Family Hubs to maximise office space and multi-agency teams to **£1,461,711**.

In addition, assuming new desk spaces would require new equipment including monitors, desks, chairs and misc. equipment upgrades (~£900), this would add additional costs. These additional have been included within refurbishment cost where there are new desks being introduced into a building.

Rutland House

Rutland House is the main council office accommodating children's services and social work staff. On the Ground Floor it contains an important conference room facility, lobby and waiting area that is used for multi agency meetings and family conferences. This floor also contains the Placements team, disused space, a large corridor leading to the shopping precinct. Across the corridor are a number of vacant offices some of which were previously leased by solicitors. This is a crucial facility for

the adequate delivery of children's care services. The space is in need of upgrade. We understand that there are already plans from outside of Children's Services to invest in the refurbishing of high quality conference facilities and meeting rooms in the former solicitors' offices. These plans include conversion to 4 small meeting rooms for up to 4 people, and a large meeting room for up to 16 people. There will be one small area left for use as storage.

Children's Services use 1,177sqm of office floorspace for 232 desks. Reconfiguration and refurbishment of this space would cost £705,900.

Desk Booking And Agile Work

To maximise the use of existing assets for multi-agency teams, we recommend the provision of a desk and room booking system, and shift to more agile and flexible working patterns across the childcare and social work services teams. This will require both additional systems as well as a culture and behaviour change in ways of working. This does not mean the end to office based working, but rather maximises the potential for community based and flexible working patterns that maximise existing assets. This will require new desk and room booking software. The Governments recommended desk and room booking service (Bookinglab Limited) charges up to £50,000 per year for an unlimited desk, and room license. As this would be a Council-wide system it is **not included** in the capital proposal for Children's Services.

This costing does not consider staff resource and has not been tested with HBC's IT and systems teams for feasibility.

6. Recommendations & Conclusions

1. SERVICE DELIVERY AND SPACE UTILISATION

Summary of Preferred Options: Existing Office & Service Delivery Buildings

Building	Preferred Option
Rutland House	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make full use of existing space, with some investment to refurbish the office space. 2. Provision of high-quality conferencing facilities for multi-agency and high importance meetings, as well as community friendly service space.
Brookvale Family Hub	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invest in refurbishment of existing office space. 2. Add an extension to the side of the building to create more office space. 3. Introduce a 2/1 ratio hot desking policy with booking system. Based on 30 desks becoming hot desks.
Halton Brook Family Hub	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expand larger room to create open plan with 2 small offices. Currently underutilised space. Use the current parenting team office as service delivery space. 2. Invest in refurbishment and reconfiguration of existing office space. 3. Introduce a 2/1 ratio hot desking policy with booking system. Based on 11 desks becoming hot desks.
Halton Lodge Family Hub	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invest in refurbishment of existing office space. 2. Keep all 24 desks and introduce a 2/1 ratio hot desking policy with booking system. Based on 12 desks becoming hot desks.
Windmill Hill Family Hub	Do nothing.
Glendale Centre	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invest in refurbishment and reconfiguration of existing office space.
Ditton Family Hub	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invest in refurbishment of existing office space. 2. Create additional office space by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knocking through from the main office into the room next door that is currently used for external evening activities (or create a 'pack away' office) • Converting meeting room on the side of the youth centre to office space 3. Introduce a 2/1 hot desking system for all desks. Based on 21 desks becoming hot desks.
Kingsway Family Hub	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invest in refurbishment of existing office space and reconfigure existing space to fit in additional desks 2. Create additional desks by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merging Managers Office and 3 smaller offices connected to Children's Centre Office to create more open plan. This would allow for better space utilisation. 3. Convert the meeting rooms on the 1st floor into a Wides conferencing facility. This would require consultation with the Community Centre as Children's Service currently do not own this space. 4. Introduce a 2/1 ratio hot desking policy with booking system to all desks. Based on 32 desks becoming hot desks.
Warrington Road Family Hub	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invest in refurbishment of existing office space 2. Create additional desks by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knocking through small managers office into staff office and staff room to create one large open plan office. 3. Introduce a 2/1 ratio hot desking policy with booking system to all desks. 11 desks would become hot desks within this option 4. Conversion of Training Kitchen into conference facilities.
Upton Family Hub	Do nothing.
Municipal	Close the Municipal Building and establish a new base for the ICART / DAT team. This option has already been announced.

6. Recommendations & Conclusions

1. SERVICE DELIVERY AND SPACE UTILISATION

Summary of Preferred Options: Existing Office & Service Delivery Buildings

Building	Current Desks	New Total Desks	Additional Desks	New Staff Capacity	Additional Staff Capacity	Refurbishment Cost	Repurposing Cost	Total Cost
Rutland House	232	239	+7	239	+7	£705,900	-	£705,900
Brookvale Family Hub	20	60	+40	90	+70	£82,516	£370,000	£452,516
Halton Brook Family Hub	13	22	+9	33	+20	£15,275	£109,200	£124,475
Halton Lodge Family Hub	24	24	0	36	+12	£45,900	-	£45,900
Windmill Hill Family Hub	6	6	0	6	0	-	-	-
Glendale Centre	25	29	+4	29	+4	£80,400	-	£80,400
Ditton Family Hub	20	41	+21	62	+42	£75,591	£150,220	£225,811
Kingsway Family Hub	35	64	+29	96	+61	£111,524	£180,060	£291,584
Warrington Road Family Hub	16	23	+7	34	+18	£27,425	£213,600	£241,025
Upton Family Hub	2	2	0	2	0	-	-	-
Municipal	49	0	-49	0	-49	-	-	-
Total	442	510	117	628	186	£1,144,531	£1,023,080	£2,167,611

6. Recommendations & Conclusions

1. SERVICE DELIVERY AND SPACE UTILISATION

Edinburgh Road Refurbishment

Edinburgh Road is a vacant, council owned, detached property near Widnes. The property was previously used as children's accommodation. While it could be refurbished to provide additional children's accommodation, and would be suitable to accommodate up to 5 residents in a homely setting, it could also be used as service space, including family time space, as well as meeting rooms for conferences. It sits on a large plot, and could be converted to provide sufficient parking onsite.

Based on a total site area, and additional internal area totalling 120 sqm, and at a high refurbishment cost of £2,000 per sqm (due to length of time vacant), this could cost in the region of **£250,000 to convert**.

Inglefield

Inglefield Children's Centre is a large and complex facility. It accommodates children with disabilities and complex needs for respite care and overnight stays. It requires high space standards, as well as adequate rooms to cater for overnight staff accommodation and disability access. It is attached to the Halton Women's Centre and Lavender House.

There are a number of internal service areas, parking spaces, open spaces, corridors and access routes which mean that the building is of inefficient design. A potential option would be the demolition and redevelopment of the site to maximise the space and provide a bespoke and tailored facility to accommodate the diverse needs of the community. In total the site area covers 0.387 ha.

It is also located adjacent to the former Fiddlers Three pub site, which has been demolished and cleared. This could create a site of approximately 0.67 ha which could provide capacity for a significant facility.

Assuming a plot ratio of 40%; a two and three storey development; internal area for rooms of 60%; an allowance of 90sqm per room; and average costs of £2,500 and £2,800 per sqm.

The scheme could potentially accommodate between **20 and 27 units** with ample additional space for community use.

This could cost between **£13.2 million and £19.0 million, equivalent to £0.6 and £0.7 million per additional room.**

Should 50% of these rooms be rented out / made available for out of area use, and charged at a rate of £800 per week, with 80% occupancy this would generate between £330,000 and £450,000 per annum. Based on the cost for development this would achieve a payback period of between 39 and 42 years.

Based on this estimate it is unlikely to provide value for money, unless higher density delivery options are considered. Higher density could certainly be achieved onsite should there be appetite for further investigation.

During stakeholder engagement, it was agreed that the preferred option for Inglefield at this stage is to **do nothing**.

6. Recommendations & Conclusions

1. SERVICE DELIVERY AND SPACE UTILISATION

Lavendar House

Lavender House is an existing 3 bed independent living unit for care leavers age 16 to 18. It is attached to but run separately by P3 Charity. In its current form it is not suitable for its current use, and there are other facilities better suited to independent living units.

There is the potential for the existing services to be relocated and the building to be converted and brought into the current facility for use as respite accommodation for children, as an extension to Inglefield. This could include those from outside of the area, which could provide an income stream to council to reinvest in children services. Stakeholder engagement also established a desire to open Lavendar House 7 days a week

The building current covers 150 sqm, and with conversion costs of ~£2,000 per sqm (as an existing in use asset which could be easily converted) could cost in the region of £300,000 to convert.

Care Leavers Hub

The final project proposed under service delivery is the development of a Care Leavers Hub, providing rooms for direct work with care leavers and some office space. Whilst a site/asset has not yet been identified for this, a high level cost assumption for the delivery of this is £250,000.

2. ACCOMMODATION SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY

The following table provides an overview of the key projects identified in the Accommodation Sufficiency Strategy. The analysis presented in this report highlights the significant shortfall in HBC's provision of children's accommodation which is an urgent need.

This identifies 7 projects which could deliver 32 children's accommodation spaces, with a total capital cost of £1.65 million, equivalent to £51,563 per unit.

Site	Capacity	HBC Estimated Capital Investment
Juno home 1- 14 Summer Lane	3 Beds	£0.0m
Juno home 2- Offer made on home in Widnes	3 beds	£0.0m
Halton Home 1- to be in Widnes	2/3 beds	£.550m
Rutland Street	3 Beds	£0.600m
18+ Supported Accommodation Development 1	10 Flats (care leavers)	£0.150m
18+ Supported Accommodation Development 2	10 Flats	£0.100m
Appleton Village / Park House	3 beds (care leavers)	£0.250m
Total	32	£1.65 million

6. Recommendations & Conclusions

SUMMARY

This analysis has shown that there is increasing demand for children's accommodation services in Halton. This includes both new accommodation provision, but also the importance of maximising the use of existing assets, including the family hubs and office space, for both delivery of increased children's service activities and capacity, and also the efficiency of service delivery.

To do this we have identified the need for:

1. Service delivery and space utilisation

- Repurpose and refurbish Family Hubs to include expanded office provision and support multi-agency, community-based services
- Implement desk and room booking, as well as equipment and training to maximise the use of all council assets and support flexible, agile and remote working across teams
- Repurpose and invest in crucial conferencing space at Rutland House and create conferencing facilities in Widnes
- Maximise the use of current vacant assets such as Edinburgh Road for service delivery

2. Children's Accommodation

- Maximise the use of current vacant assets such as Appleton Village / Park House for potential independent living units
- Repurposing of Lavender House to increase the capacity for care
- Support the Accommodation Sufficiency Strategy to deliver up to an additional 32 bed spaces across 7 sites

The potential costs associated with this strategy are listed below.

These costs are high-level benchmarks that are not RICS accredited or developed by a regulated financial advisor (FCA) / QS consultant. They are based on high-level ideas using floorplans and have not been designed by an architect. They are intended to give a broad benchmark of what costs may look like, but next steps will require feasibility testing, architect designs and QS costings.

Contingency of 25% has been included, as well as £100,000 per year (over a 3-year programme) for implementation costs that would involve bringing in external expertise to manage the overall project.

Project	Indicative Cost Estimate
1. Service delivery and space utilisation	
Family Hub Upgrades	£1,461,711
Rutland House	£705,900
Edinburgh Road	£250,000
Lavendar House	£300,000
Care Leavers Hub	£250,000
Sub-total	£ 2,967,611
2. Children's Accommodation	
Accommodation Sufficiency Strategy	£1,650,000
Sub-Total	£ 4,617,611
Contingency (25%)	£1,154,403
Implementation Costs (over 3 years)	£300,000
Total	£6,072,014

SUMMARY OF CHILDREN'S ASSETS THAT REQUIRE CAPITAL FUNDING

NB: Asset improvements with no associated costs for HBC are included in detailed tabs labelled 'sufficiency' and 'office space service p

NB: Assets with limited options for increased space have been removed from the list (Upton, Inglefield, Murdishaw, Castlefield's, The i

NB: Assets where the service have chosen to 'do nothing' are not included in the table below.

NB: Costs are very high-level benchmarks and are not RICS or QS costs. They should be used as an order of magnitude, with architects

Last Updated:		Estimated Total
27/01/26		£ 6,072,014.00
Updated By:		Sufficiency
Natalie Hyde		£ 1,800,000.00
		Office Space/ Service Provision
		£ 2,817,611.00

Proposal	Asset	Cost
2-3 bed residential home	Home 1 - Widnes	£ 550,000.00
3 bed residential home	Home 2 - Runcorn	£ 600,000.00
3 bed (care leavers)	Appleton Village/ Park House	£ 250,000.00
10 flats (care leavers)	16 + Supported Accommodation Development 1	£ 150,000.00
Family Time Team & Family Supervision	Edinburgh Road	£ 250,000.00
10 flats (care leavers)	18 + Supported Accommodation Development 2	£ 100,000.00
Care leavers hub - rooms for direct work and office space	Care Leavers Hub - Unidentified	£ 250,000.00
Invest in refurbishment & create up to 99sqm of additional office space by knocking through from the main office into the room next door that is currently used for external evening activities (or create a 'pack away' office). Convert meeting room on the side of the youth centre into office space. Introduce 2:1 ratio hot desking. Children's Services do not own main office and the room next door so collaboration and consultation is essential with community centre managers.	Ditton Family Hub	£ 225,811.00
Make full use of existing space with investment in refurbishment of the office including conference and meeting room space.	Rutland House	£ 705,900.00

Invest in refurbishment and reconfigure existing space to fit in additional desks by knocking through the small managers office into the staff office & staff room creating one large open plan office. Introduce 2:1 ratio hot desking	Warrington Road Family Hub	£	241,025.00
Lavendar House is not suitable for office space or a care leavers hub: Various considerations for use of property as follows: - Extension to Inglefield creating an extra bed for children needing emergency care. - Open Lavendar House for 7 days a week with additional	Lavender House	£	300,000.00
Invest in refurbishment, introduce 2:1 ratio hot desking, extend the office	Brookvale Family Hub	£	452,516.00
Utilise the old office space by expanding the larger room to create open plan office with 2 small offices (space not currently in use) and use the current parenting team office as service delivery space. Parenting team would remain and be accommodated within the office space.	Halton Brook	£	124,475.00
Invest in refurbishment.	Halton Lodge Family Hub	£	45,900.00
Invest in refurbishment, potential safeguarding conferencing facility.	Glendale	£	80,400.00

provision'. They are not included in the table below.
 (Old Police Station).

and QS consultants needing to be involved for the next phase.

Category	Comment
Sufficiency	
Sufficiency	
Sufficiency	
Sufficiency	
Office Space/ Service Provision	Building to be used by Family Time Team for office space and direct work with children and families
Sufficiency	Each care leaver receives a £3000 start up grant for moving into supported accomodation. This funding may not be required and has been included in this report as a contingency.
Office Space/ Service Provision	
Office Space/ Service Provision	<p>Potential for a team to work from here. Following teams require locations:</p> <p>Family Help MDT Transition team Children with Disability Team ICART/DAT SWA FGDM</p> <p>Potential for safeguarding conference facility.</p>
Office Space/ Service Provision	<p>Solicitors moving from building and asset management investing in conference/ meeting room space. Confirmation that this is being funded by corporate.</p> <p>Potential for a number of teams to work from here. Following teams require locations:</p> <p>Family Help MDT Transition team Children with Disability Team ICART/DAT SWA FGDM</p> <p>NB: Property Services have confirmed that the meeting room space will contain 4 small meeting rooms for a maximum of 4 people in each room, one large room which will cater for 14/16 people with presentation facilities and a storage area.</p>

Office Space/ Service Provision	<p>Potential for a team to work from here. Following teams require locations: Family Help MDT Transition team Children with Disability Team ICART/DAT SWA FGDM</p> <p>Potential for safeguarding conference facility (opportunity for suitable confidentiality for our families)</p>
Office Space/ Service Provision	<p>It is prudent to include some cost for the works at this stage, though further consideration for use of the space would be given during phasing of works.</p>
Office Space/ Service Provision	<p>Potential for a team to work from here. Following teams require locations: Family Help MDT Transition team Children with Disability Team ICART/DAT SWA FGDM</p>
Office Space/ Service Provision	<p>Potential for a team to work from here. Following teams require locations: Family Help MDT Transition team Children with Disability Team ICART/DAT SWA FGDM</p>
Office Space/ Service Provision	<p>During staff consultation some said that Halton Lodge works as it is and wouldn't need to be changed and it was not a priority for the service. It is prudent to include some cost for the works at this stage, though further consideration of priority would be given during phasing of works.</p>
Office Space/ Service Provision	<p>Potential for use of the extra space in the building. The service could use it as a safeguarding conferencing facility or additional desk space. It is prudent to include some cost for the works at this stage, though further consideration for use of the space would be given during phasing of works.</p>

Cost Model Assumptions and Development

- Level 1 – Concept Stage

At the initial concept stage, the agreed financial banding framework was applied to identify the scale of opportunity:

Banding:

High: > £11,000

Medium/High: £7,010 – £10,990 (mid-point £9,000)

Medium: £5,000 – £7,000 (mid-point £6,000)

Medium/Low: £3,010 – £4,990

Low: £0 – £3,000

- Level 2 – Refined OBC Stage

At this stage, mid-range assumptions for the Medium and Medium/High bands were not used. Instead, analysis focused directly on the actual children currently in residential care (RESI).

Cohort Overview:

Total in RESI: 73

Total weekly cost: £427,379

Average weekly cost per child: £5,854

This average was refined further using segmentations of 10 within the cohort.

Average Costs:

All Residential:

- Medium-cost placements: £5,536

- Medium/High-cost placements: £6,805

14+ Cohort (assumed SA pathway):

- Medium-cost placements: £4,599

- Borrowing Repayment

Borrowing allocation has been reviewed, specifically the £2.156m requirement, to ensure alignment with financial strategy.

- Future Cost per Week Assumptions

Based on market engagement and analysis:

- Medium: £5,500

- Medium/High: £5,750

Supported Accommodation based on current SA cohort data (excluding anomalies).

- Operating Models and Overheads

Future full business cases will include detailed financial mapping of operating costs and overheads to ensure due diligence and compliance.



Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2025-2028

Children's Social Care March 2025

**All children in care and young people will have everything that a good parent
would want for their own children**

Halton's Present - Halton's Future

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

Halton Council is committed to being the best corporate parent it can be, to the children in its care and into early adulthood. This strategy contains the most recent annualised information available and refers to key local and national information.

This strategy aims to improve outcomes for children in care and care leavers through the provision of a sufficient number and range of high-quality placements and accommodation options. It also describes how the Council will work with partners over the next three years to meet the statutory 'Sufficiency Duty' set out in legislation.

Primarily, our Sufficiency Duty contributes to improving outcomes for children and young people, ensuring that they have the best start in life, feel loved and be cared for. Having a sufficient number and range of local placements, that provide high quality care, is good for children and young people. It gives them a sense of belonging and promotes their continued relationships with family, friends and school. As they grow toward adulthood, it helps them stay in touch and get support from those people who have been important to them.

In addition, the success in delivering this strategy will support significant cost savings for the Council. This is because managing our commissioning and provision of placements can improve the quality and value for money.

There have been a number of internal structural, local and national sector changes since the previous strategy. The greatest impact on the success of the previous sufficiency strategy and Halton's ability to achieve what we set out to do, has been the increase year on year of the number of Children in Care. This has resulted in a need to review and revise the aims and objectives of this strategy while continuing to strive towards our intended goal to increase the number, type and quality of placements.

In addition, children, and those with care experience, have told us they would like more choice in where they live, who they live with, and how they are cared for. At the Corporate Parenting Board, the Children in Care Council gave a clear message that this should be one of the corporate parenting priorities. This strategy has further been endorsed by the Children in Care Council.

National Context

While Halton recognise the internal issues with sufficiency, we also recognise that national research and reviews have highlighted increased demand and consequent cost pressures on local authorities across England, particularly in terms of adolescent entrants into care, and the complexity of their needs (Holmes, Forthcoming). There are also growing concerns about the use of unregulated and unregistered placements (Greatbatch and Tate, 2020).

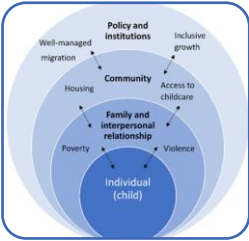
The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) undertook a year-long review into independent provision of children's placements which concluded in March 2022. The report raised a number of concerns about profit margins and debt in the sector. The CMA report made recommendations about how the market could be governed and managed in the future by a change in regulations and bringing some services in house. It recognised the competition between local authorities for scarce resources, while the number of children in care was increasing, and increased costs while suggesting potential solutions. The report was welcomed by the sector but as yet there is no change in the current arrangements.

The Care Review, chaired by Josh MacAlister, has also made a number of proposals and recommendations that promote keeping families together, increasing the use of kinship

arrangements and a fairer, more equitable, and inclusive care system. The government launched a consultation on the strategy in response to this, and other reviews, entitled '[Stable Homes Built on Love](#)'. In this strategy a number of recommendations have been accepted.


1.2 Legislation – the Sufficiency Duty

The sufficiency duty sets out a requirement for local authorities to “*systematically review the current situation in relation to ensuring sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of Children in Care/Young People and Care Leavers*”.




Care Planning

The sufficiency duty must be seen as part of a mechanism that provides young people with the most appropriate placement to meet their needs and improve their outcomes through quality assessments, care planning and decision making. The guidance also advocates strengthening the links between practitioners working with individual Children in Care and staff with responsibility for the commissioning function.



Early Help

The sufficiency duty statutory guidance acknowledges the importance of taking earlier action to support children and families to prevent children becoming looked after. This is through the provision of preventive and early intervention services to reduce the need for care proceedings as well as through clear robust links into universal and targeted services.



Sufficiency

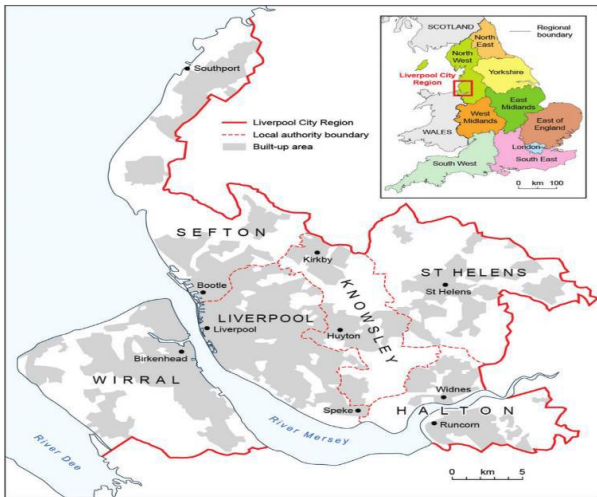
Local Authorities need to assess existing commissioning practice and identify how to ensure that services commissioned out of borough from the Local Authority can in future be delivered more locally, wherever this is practically possible and providing it is consistent with the child's welfare. Although the sufficiency duty lies with the local authority, the duty will be implemented most effectively through a partnership between the local authority and its stakeholders.

The guidance is also clear that local authorities should not move children from out of authority placements for the sole purpose of meeting the sufficiency duty if their needs are being well met by the existing range of services involved.

1.3 The Halton Context

Halton is a largely urban area; its two biggest towns are Widnes and Runcorn which face each other across the River Mersey, Ten miles upstream from Liverpool. The population of Halton has recently started to increase, in part due to a concerted effort to build new houses, as well as increased inward migration.

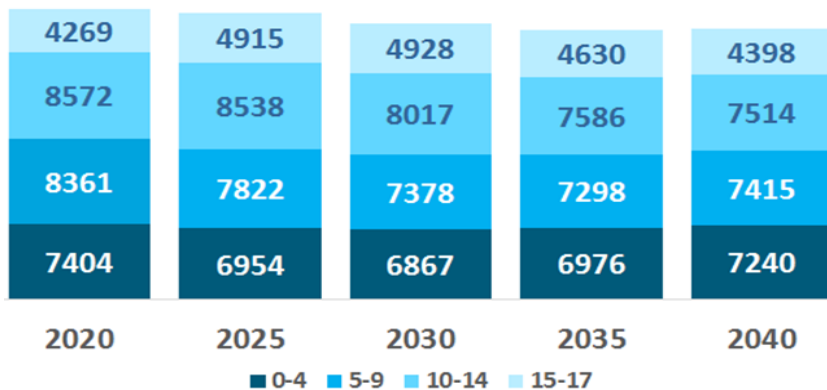
Halton is also part of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.



The current estimate of Halton’s population is 128,500 (2021, ONS). Breaking down Halton’s population by age shows that the borough has a slightly higher proportion of children and young people aged 0-24 than commonly found across England and Wales. (30.3% compared to 30.1%).

Between the last two censuses (held in 2011 and 2021) Halton’s estimated population growth (2.2%) during this time is less than Northwest England as a whole (5.2%) and significantly less than the National growth (6.6%).

The age breakdown of Halton’s population is expected to change over the next two decades. The proportion of people over the age of 70 is expected to swell and the proportion of children and people of working age is expected to contract.



By 2030, there is expected to be 1417 less people under the age of 18.

By 2040, there is expected to be 2040 less people under the age of 18.

The Borough is currently ranked as the 23rd most deprived local authority in England. Almost 1 in 5 children aged under 16 in Halton live in relative low-income households (19.6%), which is slightly higher than the England average (19.1%).

Unfortunately, this proportion has increased in recent years, both locally and nationally.

1.4 Halton Children in Care and Care Leavers

The number of children in care in Halton has been increasing and they have been remaining in care for longer. The in-house provision available has not been able to keep pace with this demand. The Council also does not have as much in-house fostering capacity as it needs. The range of regulated care leavers accommodation is growing but a continued focus on

suitable resources is needed in this area, following the introduction of the Supported Accommodation Regulations in October 2023.

The population of Children in Care as of April 2024 stood at 383, this evidences a slight decrease in numbers when compared to April 2023 (385 Children in Care), however our rate per 10,000 as of April 2024 is 139, placing us higher than our comparators.

We want children to live locally with family members wherever possible, and have access to local services that provide for their long-term health, mental health, education, plus any identified specialist needs. Where this is not possible, we need a range of placements, including foster carers, childrens homes and supported accommodation, to provide nurturing and safe care and support, as close to Halton as possible.

Not having the right number and type of placements locally has meant that some children have been placed outside of Halton, and we have an over reliance on independent fostering agency carers and residential provision to meet our placement needs.

This Sufficiency Strategy seeks as far as possible to address these issues.

1.5 What Children and Young People Told Us

We know that older children in care and care leavers have told us consistently that the range and quality of accommodation for care leavers is not adequate. They want to have choices about who they live with and to always consider if they can go home to family.

Most children in care tell us that they have a preference for foster care over residential care, though a very small number say they prefer the option of residential care. Halton’s position is that family-based care is always considered first, and, regularly reviewed as a step down placement for those currently in residential care.

2. Our Vision

2.1 The Children and Young Peoples Plan and alignment with other strategies.

This strategy sets out our approach to providing the *right placements in the right place at the right time* for all of our children in care and care leavers.

It is also essential for delivery of the objectives in the Care Leavers Local Offer ([Care Leavers Local Offer | Local Offer](#))

This strategy also incorporates the Aiming High principles of the Children and Young Peoples Partnership Plan 2024-2027. [Halton CYPP FINAL.pdf](#)

VISION
WHAT WE DO EVERY DAY AND THE OUTCOMES WE WILL ACHIEVE TOGETHER

AIMING HIGH

WE ENSURE THAT ALL CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE ARE
SAFE - HAPPY - HEALTHY - SUCCEEDING

PURPOSE
WHY WE ARE ALL HERE
SUPPORTING CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & FAMILIES

CHALLENGES
THOSE THINGS THAT ARE MOST DETRIMENTAL TO OUR CHILDREN'S LIVES AND FUTURES
POVERTY - HEALTH - NEGLECT - EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

<p>OUR STRATEGIC ENABLERS</p> <p>WHAT WE MUST FOCUS ON</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working in partnership Developing the workforce Raising our aspirations 	<p>OUR TOP PRIORITIES</p> <p>WHAT WILL MAKE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE, QUICKLY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevention and Early Intervention Improving Professional Practice Increasing Education Attendance
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2.2 What we want to achieve.

Our vision in relation to placement provision for children in care and care leavers includes:

Halton's children will always be supported to stay with, or return to their families and communities, wherever it is safe to do so.

For those children who cannot return home, we will achieve permanency within their family network, adoption, special guardianship and approved long term fostering at the earliest opportunity.

Residential care will only be chosen in exceptional circumstances and for short periods.

We will endeavour to ensure that Halton's children will live locally, in the Borough area boundary or within 20 miles.

They will know about a placement household and the carer before they move in and where possible, will have a choice of carer.

We will improve the timeliness of adoption.

Children in foster care will be supported to 'stay put' with their carer beyond age 18.

Young People 16 and over will have access to a range of suitable supported accommodation.

We will improve care planning for all children and utilise commissioning and partnership working to support the development of sufficiency and to ensure we achieve the outcomes in this strategy.

3. Placement Needs Analysis

We have undertaken a placement needs analysis to inform this placement sufficiency strategy. This section summarises the main findings from the analysis.

3.1 Current Profile of Children in Care

Children in Care (CIC) rate has been fluctuating since June 2022, with our highest rate being 146 in November 2023. As of March 2024, there were 139 Halton children in care. The majority of the children entering care had abuse or neglect recorded as the primary need.



The number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) has started to decline in recent months, with our current figure being 17 in January 2025 (8% of our CIC population) and our highest month being September 2023 at 22 (10.5% of our population).

Halton continue to promote parents and family as the best option for permanency for a child and work is ongoing to strengthen the early help offer, and therefore prevent children coming into care. Halton have 10% of children in care who are placed with their own parents on a Care Order as of January 2025.

Currently, the gender split within the children in care population is 52% male, 48% female. 93% of children in care in Halton are White British. There are 27 (7%) children being identified from a different ethnic background. 34 (9%) children in care have a disability recorded.

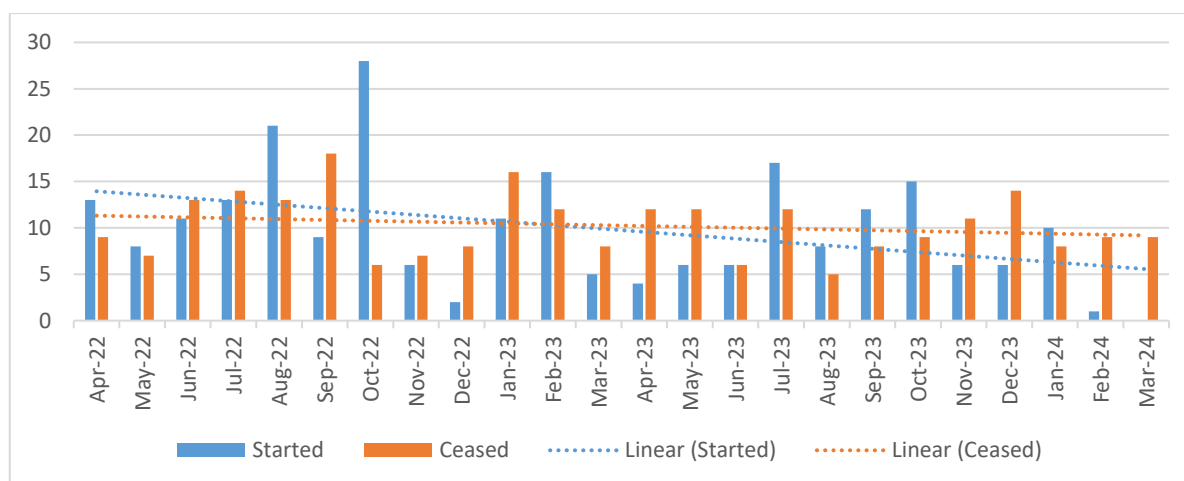
The age breakdown of children in care at the end of March 2024 was as follows:

Age 0 to 4 – 84 children (22 %). National average comparator 18%
Age 5 to 9 – 79 children (21 %). National average comparator 18%
Age 10 to 15 – 147 children (38 %). National average comparator 38%
Age 16 and over – 73 children (19 %). National average comparator 26%

The CIC numbers have remained high, but steady, with a reducing trend. The primary reason why children and young people left care was because they returned home to live with parents/relatives (23 children). 12 Children left with a special guardianship order. We track and monitor children who have a plan to return to the family on a monthly basis to avoid drift and delay.

During the reporting year April 2023 – March 2024, 120 children left the care system, which was a 9% reduction on the previous year. 10 were discharged from care into successful adoptions.

The graph below illustrates the reducing trend for ceasing and starting over the last 2 years from April 2022 to April 2024.



Performance of the number of days taken to move through the adoption process is measured in the Adoption Scorecard, and this is measured over a three-year average.

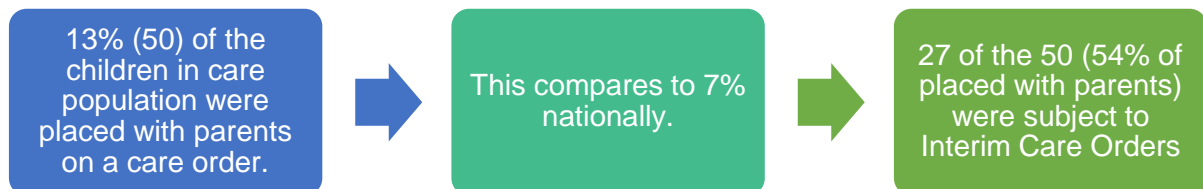
For the number of days from entering care to placement with prospective adopters, and the number of days from Placement Order to match with prospective adopters, Halton has been reducing the average.

3.2 Placement Demand

77% of Halton's children in care were living in a family environment at the end of March 2024. This includes those in house and external foster care, those living at home with parents and placed with relatives or a friend, or placed for adoption.



At 31 March 2024, 13% of young people (49) were placed in residential care provision, identical when compared to the national average. All of these children were placed externally to Halton. Five children were placed for adoption, which equates to 1.3% of the children in care population.



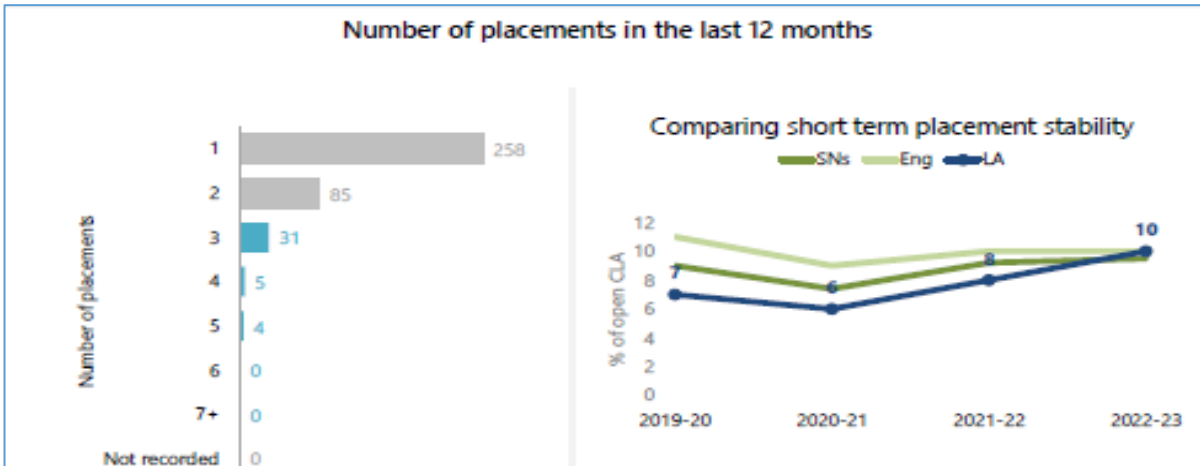
The number of Care Leavers in Halton has historically been around 75 at any one time. However, due to recent year's increases in the number of children in care, particularly the number of older young people entering the care system, and unaccompanied asylum seekers, the number of care leavers has risen.

In January 2024, there were 79 eligible Care Leavers open to the service, however this figure is expected to rise over the next two years. It is anticipated additional children in care will become Care Leavers before 2026, and currently 18 Care Leavers aged 21-25 using our extended offer service.

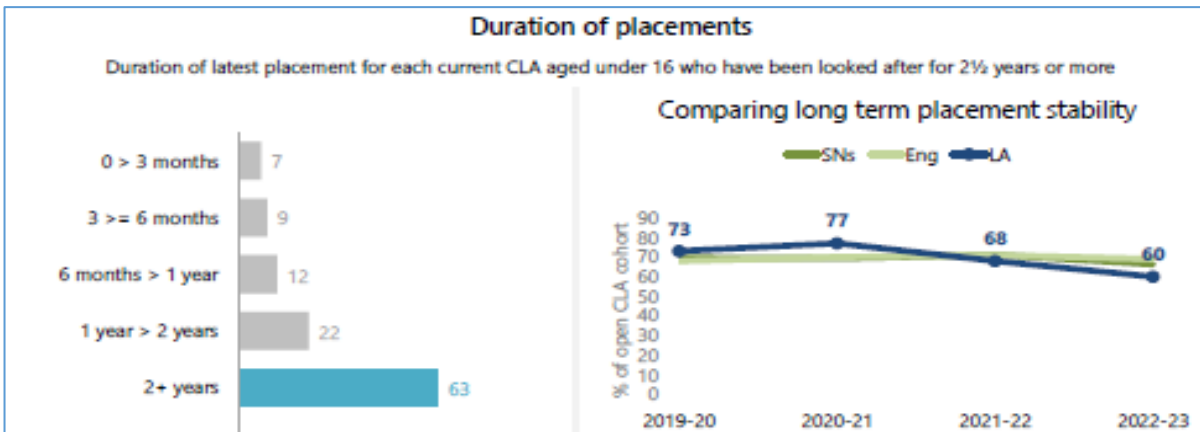
Halton joined Together 4 Adoption regional adoption agency (RAA) in September 2017. Together 4 Adoption complete the work for all adoptions wherever possible but on occasions it is necessary to spread the net further to other regional adoption agencies. As of end of March 2024, 4 children were in 'placed for adoption' with a Placement Order. There were also 26 children with a permanence plan of adoption.

3.3 Placement Stability

Performance for stable placements of over 3 years, at the end of March 2024 looks in line for the previous year's trend, at 10.4% (40 children). Halton has been in line with comparators for the previous three years by supporting placements and preventing breakdown where possible.

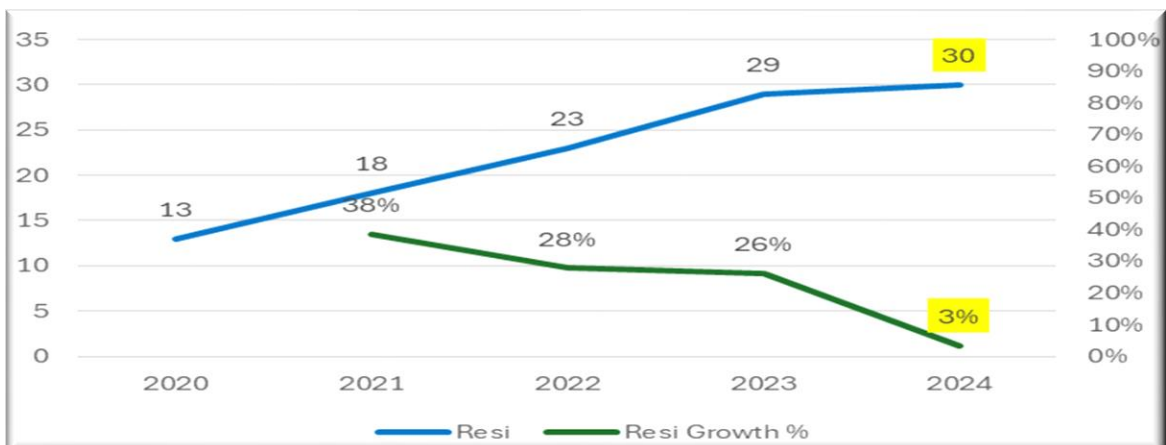


At the end of March 2024, 63% of Children in Care were looked after for 2+ years in the same placement. This remains a focus with a new permanency panel to ensure children are in their long-term arrangement at the earliest opportunity.



3.4 Projected Children in Care - Population and Profile

This strategy aims to safely contribute to our vision that more children will remain at home, be returned home, or placed in family-based care. It aims for fewer children in residential care, with more children placed in local internal resources, rather externally commissioned IFA, Residential or Supported Accommodation provision.



Since 2020 there has continually been steady growth in the number of new placements required, compared to the previous year. Halton are currently forecasting that this growth in new placements has plateaued for 2024/25 when compared to 2023/24. With the exception of some, the majority of new placements are within the parameters of national average placement rates as per the Children’s Homes Association (CHA) expectations.

We will be seeking to reduce admissions of adolescents by focusing on early help and a restructure of services, through a dedicated edge of care lens. We know too many children are coming into care where there is potential that they could have been better supported to remain living within their families.

We are not projecting a reduction in young children aged under four coming into care and will be seeking to secure very early permanence for all young children admitted to care, and anticipate increasing numbers of adoption placements over each year of this strategy.

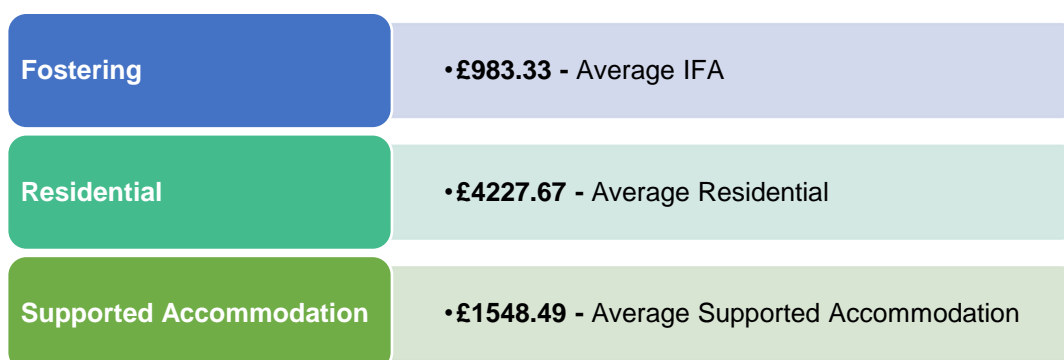
Our numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Halton has been recently decreasing, and we now have 8% (17) of our children in care population defined as UASC. Our highest numbers in the last year has been 10.5% (29). We will continue to provide services for these young people, primarily in family-based placements and supported accommodation for those of leaving care age.

We anticipate that demand for Supported Accommodation will increase over the next year, given the increased numbers of children in care aged 16/17 at present. However, if we succeed in reducing our children in care population overall, in particular in reducing admissions of adolescents, the result will be a corresponding reduction in demand for care/support by the latter stages of this strategy.

We now provide Staying Put foster care, Supported Lodgings and locally sourced Supported Accommodation placements for increasing numbers of care leavers and working effectively with local registered social landlords (RSL’s).

3.5 Placement Costs

The average weekly unit costs per child in each different placement type is as below:



In-house foster carer placements are by far the most cost-efficient placement option and residential provision, of any kind, is the most expensive. Halton Council aim to place more children in foster care, with particular focus on in-house foster care, which will support achievement of significant cost efficiencies.

The cost of Supported Accommodation is increasing rapidly and we aim to both develop our in-house Supported Lodgings Service and continue to build local relationships with our RSL’s

shortest time possible. We are planning our services to deliver excellent early help, edge of care and family support services that help to keep families together.

Research by the Department for Education and the Association of Directors of Children's Services has identified that in particular outcomes for adolescents entering care in their teens are on average, poor. This research informs our approach and aspirations to develop and deliver excellent edge of care services to adolescents and their families to support them to stay together.

4.2 What is Currently Working Well?

Halton has a number of systems and processes in place across Early Help which has supported the positive developments below:

Early Help

We work well with our Early Help services, and have a dedicated community support workers in our Child in Need social work teams offering intense support to children at the edge of care. We are embedding systemic family practice to Halton, with a focus on children with complex emotional and behavioural needs, this will further strengthen our edge of care offer through targeted evidence-based models of working. We have a multi-agency Early Help Strategy and a Neglect Strategy that have a positive impact.

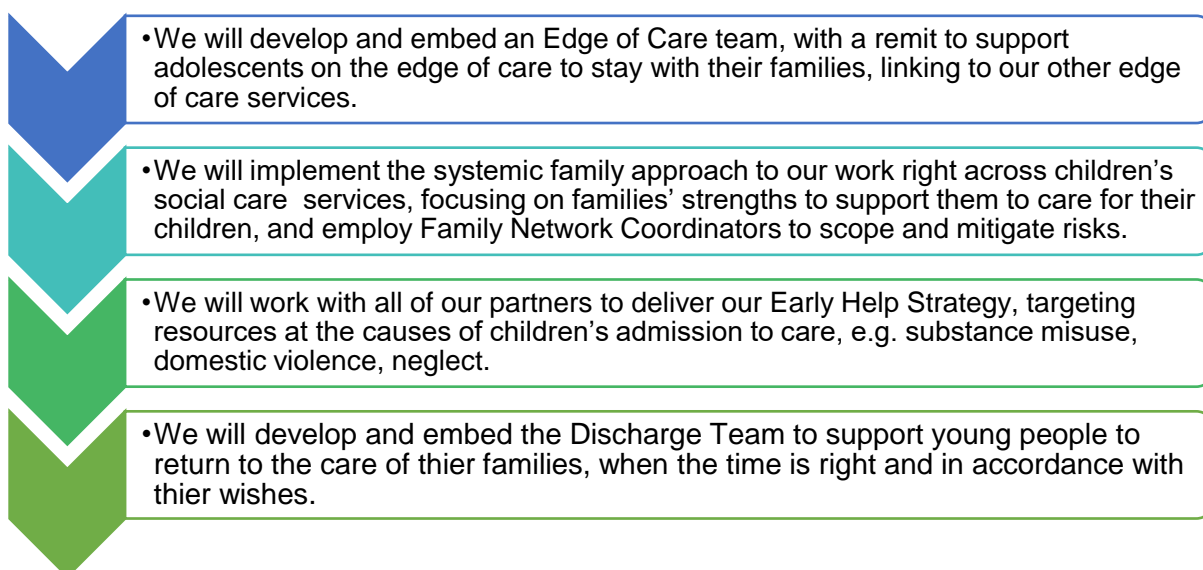
Special Guardianship

We will focus on converting our high numbers of 'connected persons' foster care these arrangements to SGO. The number of children who left care via SGO has been relatively stable (6 in 2019, and 7 in 2020). For the year to March 2023 there were 20 which has shown a marked increase.

Public Law Outline

We continue to improve our practice and use of the Public Law Outline process to work to support parents to avoid care proceedings and subsequent admission to care. It is a priority to reduce the overall numbers and length of time of proceedings.

4.3 Next Steps

- 
- We will develop and embed an Edge of Care team, with a remit to support adolescents on the edge of care to stay with their families, linking to our other edge of care services.
 - We will implement the systemic family approach to our work right across children's social care services, focusing on families' strengths to support them to care for their children, and employ Family Network Coordinators to scope and mitigate risks.
 - We will work with all of our partners to deliver our Early Help Strategy, targeting resources at the causes of children's admission to care, e.g. substance misuse, domestic violence, neglect.
 - We will develop and embed the Discharge Team to support young people to return to the care of their families, when the time is right and in accordance with their wishes.

As identified, we need to take further action to support children and their families so they can safely stay at, or return, home. This is especially important given the CMR and Care Review evidence indicating that outcomes for adolescents entering care are particularly poor.

5. Placement Planning for Disabled Children

5.1 The Importance of Planning for Disabled Children

Children with disabilities and their parents have a right to expect us to provide the same opportunities to local placements, family placements, and permanence, including permanence outside of care through adoption or Special Guardianship, as we do for other children in care.

There should not be an assumption for children with disabilities that adoption is unachievable for them, that their disability prevents them from being able to live in a foster family, or that it is more acceptable for them to be placed far away from their families and communities. In order to meet the needs of children with disabilities for local family placements and permanence, we need to understand their placement needs and plan placement provision specifically in response to these.

7.2 What is Working Well?

Internal Provision

Halton operates an overnight short breaks unit, Inglefield House, for children and young people with a range of disabilities, complex needs and behaviour. The regulated home is registered to take up to four children at any one time, under the age of 18 years of both genders, who have either physical or learning disabilities or sensory impairment. The children who receive this service have been assessed as being in need of short-term overnight care, away from the family home. Depending on the assessed level of need packages up to a maximum of 75 overnights a year may be delivered. The home is currently rated as Good by Ofsted following the last inspection. Additionally, there were 22 children and young people utilising our internal short breaks children's home, two of whom had child in need status.

Established Workforce and Integrated Working

We have a dedicated children with disability social worker in post and good links to our SEND team, and we have a robust SEND local offer.

Service Development

Halton are looking to develop an integrated 0-25 Disabilities Team, which will support young people into adulthood, and aid transitions from and between the services they need.

7.3 Next Steps



- We will actively target adopter recruitment activity at individuals and couples who could be a family for children with disabilities work with Together for Adoption, and recruit more short break and respite foster carers for children with disabilities to provide support to permanent fostering, adoption and Special Guardianship placements.



- We will work with independent sector residential providers to commission sufficient local/in Borough residential provision for the small number of disabled children who may require a residential placement, so as to ensure we do not have to place children at distance to meet their very special needs.



- We will promote a culture that recognises the right of disabled children to grow up in a family, developing a policy to fund home adaptations for foster carers and adopters where they are caring or propose to care for a child with disability where such an adaptation is necessary to meet the child's needs



- We will continue to work with Adults Social Care to explore and develop the 0-25 Disabilities Team, designed to better support young people of all ages through transition and beyond.

6. Local Family-Based Fostering Placements

6.1 The Importance of Local Family Based Placements

The Human Rights Act sets out the right to a family life. It is essential that our children experience the benefits of a family life, and we aim to ensure that the vast majority of our children reside in family-based fostering provision.

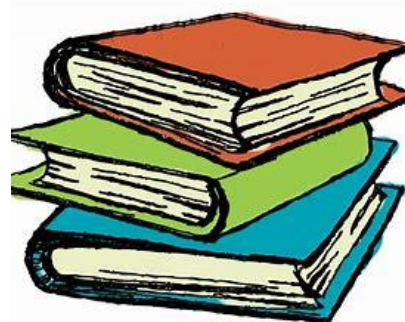
There will always be a small minority of older children who, because of their needs at a particular time in their life, cannot live in a family environment. We recognise that residential care can offer a short respite but is not suitable for long term family-based care.



Where residential provision is used, it should be for a very small number of children and for the shortest possible time, as a means to prepare young people for living in a family.

We also want all of our children to be placed locally, close to their birth family, schools and communities. Placing children locally will support them to maintain relationships with family and friends and to continue in the same school.

We know that where children are placed locally, we and our partners in education and health are better able to support them and to monitor their progress. It also makes it easier for us to support them to engage with other children in care and ourselves about how we can improve their experiences and outcomes for them and other children in care.



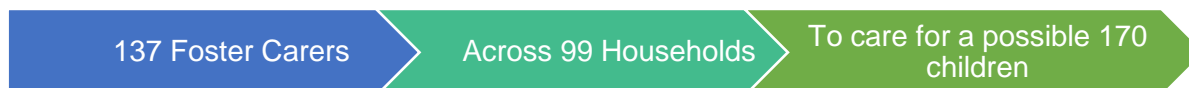
Local family-based placements mean there is far less risk of developing an 'out of sight, out of mind' culture spoken about by Edward Timson, MP at the launch of the Children and Families Bill 2013, (Act of Parliament 2014).

Halton are looking to improve in these areas over the course of this strategy and, to inform improvements, we need to recognise where we are already developing good practice.

6.2 What is Working Well?

Internal Fostering

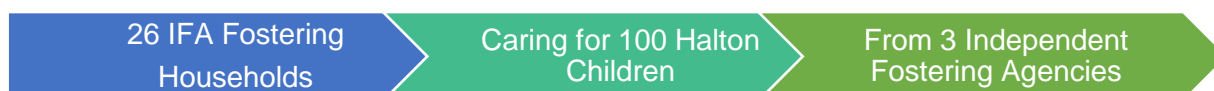
Within Halton Council's internal fostering service there are:



There are dedicated recruitment strategies and initiatives in place to build quantity and resilience across our internal provision, and we continue to provide a dedicated competitive offer to our carers.

Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA)

Halton Council utilises the regional North West Fostering Framework, operated by Placements North West and has the following access to IFA in borough:



There is also access to additional placements through the Framework across the Liverpool City Region, and the North West. Halton also leads the Liverpool City Region Provider Partnership Agreement, a regional Merseyside and Cheshire framework.

Fostering Recruitment

We are collaborating with neighbouring Cheshire authorities to enhance our marketing and recruitment of foster carers; this will mean we can reach more carers and attract more foster carers to Halton. In time this will increase our in-house fostering households and reduce our reliance on IFA and residential placements.

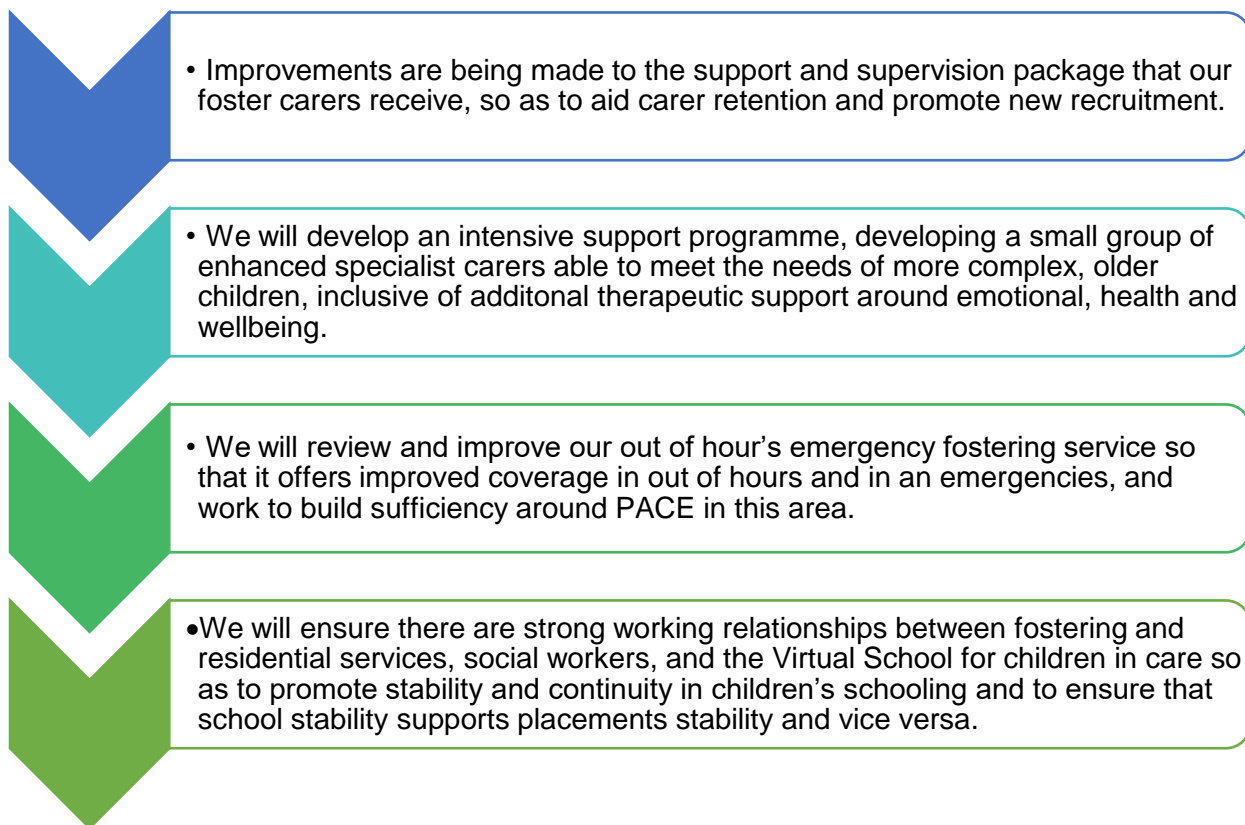
Halton approved an additional 16 fostering households (including connected person) during the reporting year to March 2023, including three mainstream households. We are having some success attracting experienced independent fostering agency carers to transfer to us and we will continue to respond and welcome interest from such carers.

Local Fostering Placements

66% (246) of children are placed in or within a 20-mile radius of Halton; this means we can provide local support services to meet identified needs.

6.3 Next Steps

It is essential to the delivery of this strategy that we develop a good in-house fostering service which is able to meet the placement needs of the majority of our children in care.



7. Residential Accommodation

7.1 The importance of Good Quality Residential Childrens Homes

For a number of years Halton had substantially more, privately owned, externally managed, residential provisions located within its boundary, than the number of places it commissioned. Given the regional increase in use of external residential placements, alongside lower cost of housing, cheaper labour and motorway access this is no longer the case.

We have strengthened our working practice alongside our Planning colleagues to ensure that providers are encouraged to engage with Commissioning prior to submitting any applications.

The Local Authority does not currently have any in-house Residential provision. All Residential placements are commissioned via the North West Residential Framework, operated by Placements North West and Trafford Council.

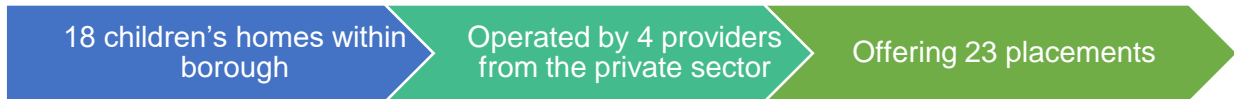
This means that we will have to review our use of independent providers, assess the outcomes children are achieving in these placements, understand these in the context of longer-term planning and wider market shaping.

7.2 What is working well?

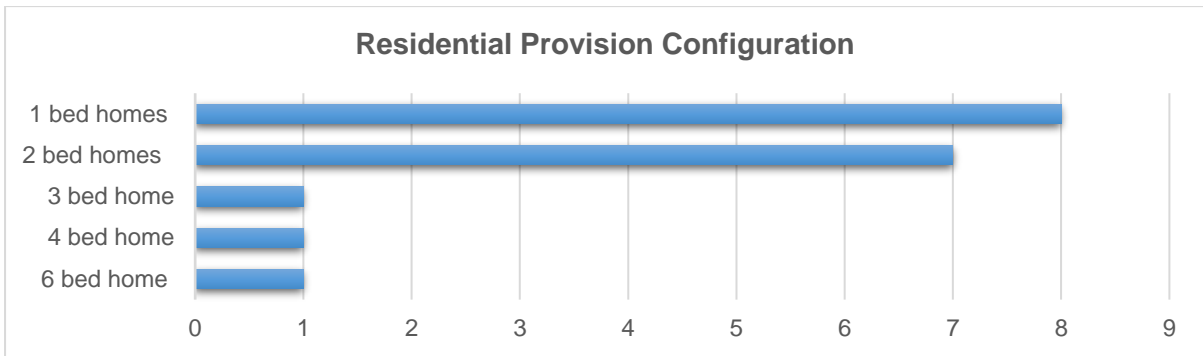
Residential Provision

There is a diverse pool of existing providers within Halton, who are available to provide placements for children and young people in their local area. These providers are open to engagement and collaboration to be innovative and work together to develop new approaches.

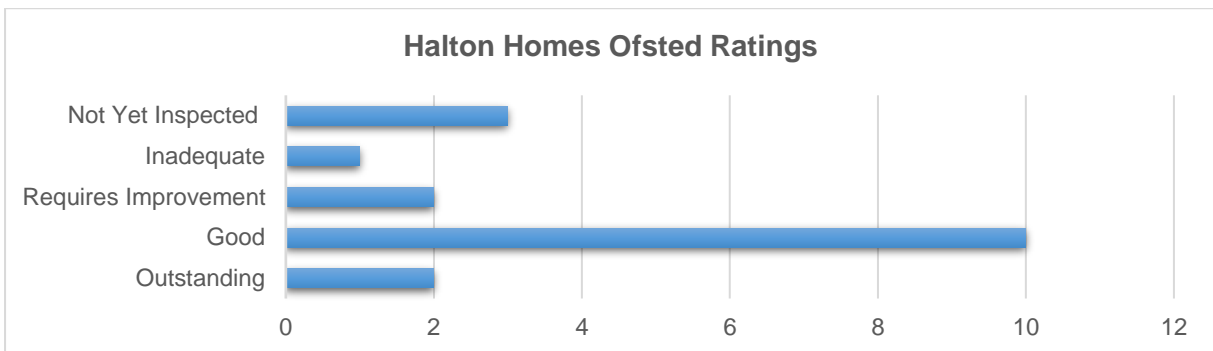
Local provision currently comprises of a high proportion of 1 and 2 bed homes, many of which are focussed on more complex placements, some of which are also used by authorities some distance from Halton. There are currently a total of:



The majority of the locally based provision is registered to meet emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD) needs 10-18 years, with 1 provision being registered to meet disability needs. The Halton residential provider market is made up of:



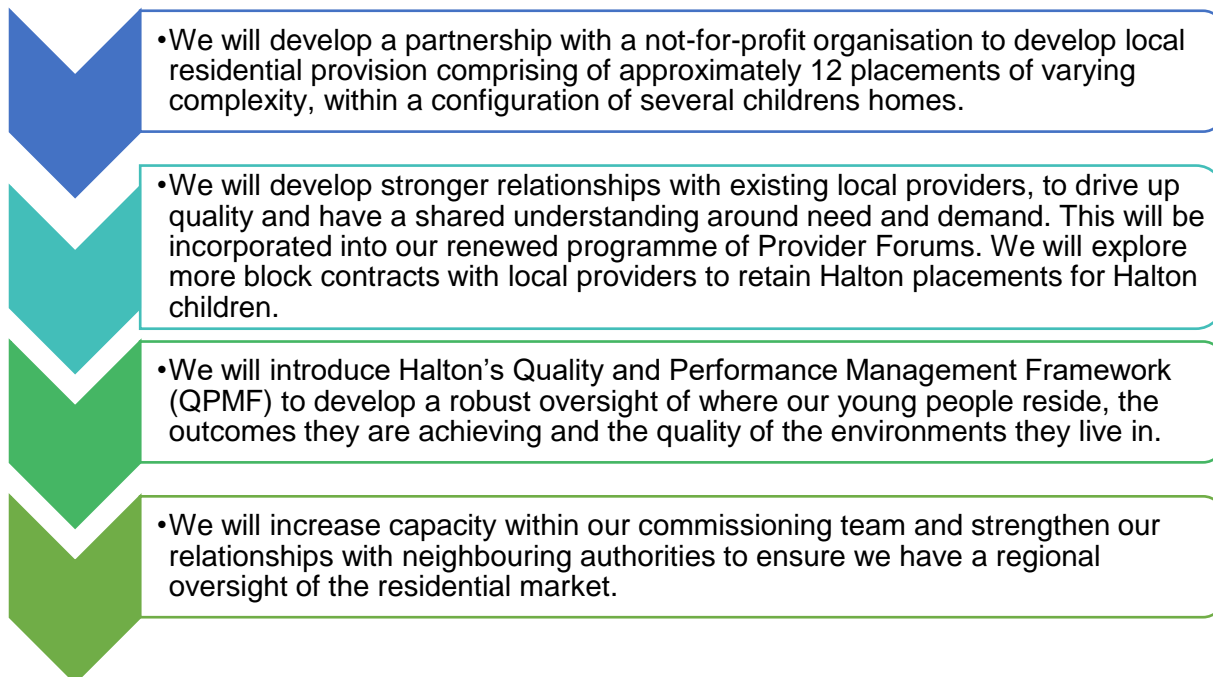
Halton continues to have the second highest concentration of 1 bed homes in the region. The current OFSTED rating for the Halton-based residential providers are:



Commissioning and Placement Team

We have an experienced Placements Team who know the local and regional landscape well, have good relationships with providers and are dedicated to the best possible outcomes for children and young people.

7.3 Next Steps



8. Supported Accommodation and Care Leavers

8.1 The Importance of Support and Stability for Care Leavers

Leaving home to live independently for young people in the general population is a challenging and anxiety provoking experience. They will be faced with new challenges and problems, but in most cases will have the support of their parents and extended family and others in their community networks. At the same time, most are not forced to leave at 18 years of age. Indeed, the average age for young people leaving home now is 26.

Leaving home/care for a looked after child is an even more challenging experience. Legally, children in care cease to be looked after at 18 years of age, but few of them are ready to be fully independent. We want to be able to provide our young people leaving care with support and guidance as close to that which their non-looked after peers get when they leave home as we can.

For that reason, we want to provide as much family like care leaver accommodation, such as 'Staying Put' foster care and to grow our Supported Lodgings offer, through review of our relevant policy and commissioning arrangements. These arrangements most closely resemble the environments that young people outside of care live in with their families and they are the most beneficial for supporting young people and providing continuing stability.

Where 'Staying Put' or Supported Lodging arrangements are not available or appropriate, we want to provide a range of Supported Accommodation provision to meet the diverse needs of the care leaver population, including those with some level of complex needs or learning difficulty.

We have an established and effective care leavers accommodation group. This meets on a monthly basis with members from housing providers and social and private landlords to ensure that all young people aged 17 and onwards are supported to find suitable accommodation.

8.2 What is Working Well?

Current Provision

Within the Halton borough, there are a range of internal Supported Accommodation options currently available from the authority, including:

- HBC Supported Lodgings Service - This small service is a sub-service of the Fostering Team and was established in early 2021, consisting of Host families in the community who are recruited, assessed and supported in much the same way as Foster Carers. To date, the Service has approved seven Host Households. This is semi-independent provision designed to bridge the gap between care and independence. The Service has supported a total of 9 young people.
- Commissioned Supported Accommodation Service – Halton currently commission a provider to operate a small group living provision, in addition to two trainer flats, which offer a step down to further independence option.
- YMCA - Self-contained flats for those aged 16-59 years, catering to those who are, predominantly, homeless. In total there are 66 beds of which 4 are direct access, subdivided into 3 units, inclusive of one designated for hospital discharge and two allocated for complex needs.
- Registered Social Landlords - Halton Borough Council can act as the tenant and floating support is delivered into the properties at a varied level to meet specific young people's needs
- We have made good progress on developing our Care Leavers Offer, however, we recognise that we need to grow our use of staying put, staying close and supported lodgings accommodation, and we are planning to expand these offers within this strategy.
- There are also a range of externally-commissioned, regulated provisions available for Halton Care Leavers in the borough, generally commissioned by the Local Authority, through private providers who are on the regional approval Supported Accommodation framework operated by Placements North West and Bolton Council.
- Within the North West region there is now in excess of 100 companies offering Supported Accommodation placements, this represents a significant increase within the last 7 years.

8.3 Next Steps

To achieve the ambitious plans around supporting our 16+ Children in Care and Care Leavers to access appropriate accommodation to meet their needs, there are a number of steps we will take. These will include:

- We will develop and expand the currently commissioned Supported Accommodation contract to include an increase in available trainer flats, alongside the existing group living accommodation.
- We will develop a portfolio of independence-focused self-contained accommodation, which will allow for equity across the borough and provide choice for children in care and care-leavers within quality Supported Accommodation.
- We will develop a "Care Leavers Hub" in the local area with dedicated spaces for Care Leavers to engage in and with additional services to support them in achieving full independence.
- We will develop a policy briefing on Staying Put Arrangements and ensure that the provision of accommodation for Care Leavers is planned in advance via robust Pathway Plans and that young people leaving care know their entitlements to support and guidance and receive them.
- We will improve transition arrangements for young people with disability and complex needs, by working closer with Adult Social Care Services in a timely manner, to generate through put of services.

9. Commissioning and Partnership Working

9.1 The Important Role of Joint Commissioning and Partnerships

It is a reality that we will continue to use a mixed market approach to the provision of placements for children in care and care leavers. In light of this, it is important that operational managers and commissioners work together to shape the care market provision so that it best meets our needs for local, high-quality, cost-effective placement accommodation.



It is essential that we work with partners in health, education, police, and housing services to plan and deliver sufficient accommodation. For example, we will need support from our health and education colleagues in planning our placement accommodation, when matching particular children to specific placements, and in supporting us to maintain the stability of placements. We will want to work co-operatively with the Police to manage and support young people at risk of offending.

9.2 What is working well??

- We are part of the regional North West Framework for Independent Fostering, Residential and Supported Accommodation provision.
- We currently lead on the Provider Partnership Agreement for the region.
- The average weekly fee that we pay for independent fostering agency placements and independent residential placements is less than the average for the region as a whole.

Alongside Practice

- Engage with parents to empower them to be change makers.
- Ensure practice is systemically trauma informed and develop robust contextual safeguarding knowledge across the system.
- Support in the development of the Neglect Strategy to improve inequality in the system.
- Support the development of the Family First Model integrated prevention strategy within the Early Help.

The commissioning activity must reflect the cross cutting activity across children's services, understanding that activity is co-dependent on success elsewhere in the system.

10. Measuring Success

10.1 How will we know we have been effective?

The provision of sufficient placement accommodation for children in care and care leavers is essential for improving their outcomes. Children in Care should be able to expect us to provide the right placement, at the right time, and in the right place.

It is therefore essential that we make progress in delivering the next step actions in this strategy.

We will measure our success based on the extent to which the following goals are achieved:

- The number of admissions into care will reduce
- The children in care and care leaver population will reduce
- The number of children and young people placed outside of Halton will reduce
- The number of children in residential care and supported accommodation will reduce
- The number of children Adopted or subject to Special Guardianship will increase.
- The number of Staying Put and Staying Close arrangements will increase.
- The number of children placed with in-house foster carers will increase.
- The number of children who are discharged from Care will increase.
- The councils expenditure on independent placements will decrease

Progress on those measures and others will be monitored and reported via the Childrens Sufficiency Board, and activity will be tracked through the Children and Families Joint Commissioning Partnership

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT TEMPLATE

Equality and Diversity UK Ltd

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Template

The Equality Act 2010 has outlined Protected Characteristics as covering: **Race, Disability, Sex, Sexual Orientation, Religion or Belief, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Gender reassignment, Maternity and Pregnancy and Age.**

Protected Groups refers to people who share a protected characteristic. The General Equality Duty requires public bodies to have due regard to:

- **Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act.**
- **Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.**
- **Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.**

Undertaking an EIA helps organisations comply with the General Equality Duty as it involves proactively considering the three aims of the Duty as part of the decision-making process.

This involves considering how organisations act as employers; how they develop, evaluate and review policy; how they design, deliver, and evaluate services, and how they commission and procure services from others.

Policy/Procedure/Function Details

Name of Policy/Procedure/Function* - Children's Services Asset Master Plan – Investment in the In-Borough Sufficiency of Children's Homes and Supported Accommodation Flats.	
EIA Carried out by:	Simon Hickman
Date:	2 nd April 2026
Equality and Diversity Coordinator: (QA)	
Date:	
Head of Department:	Zoe Fearon
Date:	2 nd April 2026
Date Passed to Governance Services Unit:	<p>This is a strategic view of EIA for the Children's Services Asset Masterplan.</p> <p>Full impact assessment to be undertaken at provision level to ensure design specifications take EIA into consideration when delivering the Sufficiency element of the plan.</p> <p>Additionally, each site project under Service Delivery/Office space will ensure EIA is completed as part of those projects.</p>

*In this template the term 'policy' is used as shorthand for what needs to be equality impact assessed. Policy needs to be understood broadly to embrace the full range of policies, practices, activities and decisions: essentially everything we do, whether it is formally written down or whether it is informal custom and practice. This includes existing policies and any new policies under development.

Section 1 – Initial EIA - to be completed for all policies

A.	<p>What is the purpose of this policy. Consider explicit and implicit aims</p>	<p>The purpose of the Children’s Services Asset Management Masterplan (CSAM) is to provide a strategic, costed plan for capital investment in Children’s Services assets so that they are aligned with current and future service delivery needs in Halton. This includes residential placements, supported accommodation, office space, and service delivery space required to support Children’s Social Care reform, the Placement and Sufficiency Strategy, and the Families First Partnership Programme.</p> <p>Implicit aims</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To reduce reliance on high cost, out-of-borough placements by increasing high-quality, local provision. When children and young people live in homes that do not meet their needs (including being out of borough, far away from family and friends), this can lead to breakdowns and poor emotional well-being so we want to ensure that more Halton children can continue to live within the borough where they can maintain relationships with their families/friends/local communities, continue their education in the borough and access healthcare provision and other trusted support services locally. • To support a shift towards an early intervention and prevention model in line with Ofsted requirements, ILACS findings, and national reform (Families First Partnership Programme). • To improve outcomes, stability, and continuity for children in care and care leavers by enabling them to live closer to family, education, health and community networks. • To improve financial sustainability and value for money within Children’s Services through an invest-to-save approach.
B.	<p>Does the policy have an impact on staff or the wider community that the organisation has links with? Please give details</p>	<p>Impact on staff</p> <p>Yes. The policy directly impacts Children’s Services staff through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved office accommodation, meeting spaces and co-location, supporting hybrid working, reflective practice and workforce wellbeing. • Enhanced multi-disciplinary working between social care, early help, SEND, health, police and education partners, particularly through the Families First Partnership Programme. • Reduced travel time for social workers as more children are placed locally, improving efficiency and enabling more direct work with families. <p>Impact on the wider community</p> <p>The policy also impacts the wider community by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping children and young people within their local communities, supporting better access to education, health services, family networks and community resources. • Supporting the local economy through increased in-borough provision, employment opportunities and use of local services. • Strengthening partnership working across statutory and voluntary sector organisations involved in safeguarding and family support.

C	<p>What results/outcomes are intended? How are these measured? What factors could contribute or detract from the outcome?</p>	<p>Intended results / outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved placement sufficiency, quality and stability for children in care and care leavers. • Reduced use of out of borough and high cost external placements, delivering recurring financial savings. • Improved outcomes and reduced trauma for children by avoiding unnecessary moves and maintaining local connections. • Improved workforce retention, wellbeing and effectiveness through better working environments and partnership working. <p>Measurement of outcomes</p> <p>Outcomes are monitored through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial monitoring via the Redesign Financial Accountability Board and Transformation governance arrangements. • Tracking placement numbers, utilisation, and costs compared with external provision. • Programme and project reporting within the Children’s Services Improvement and Transformation Programme governance framework. • Inspection outcomes (Ofsted/ILACS) and delivery of statutory improvement requirements. <p>Factors contributing to or detracting from outcomes</p> <p><i>Contributing factors:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful partnership delivery (e.g. We Are Juno CIC). • Robust project management, governance, and financial controls. • Alignment with national reform programmes such as Families First Partnership. <p><i>Detracting factors:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rising construction, property, or borrowing costs. • Changes in placement demand or complexity of children’s needs. • Delays in delivery impacting realisation of financial and service benefits.
D	<p>Is there any evidence that the policy relates to an area with known inequalities? Please give details</p>	<p>Yes. The policy relates directly to areas of known inequalities, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children in care and care leavers, who disproportionately experience poorer educational, health, and life outcomes nationally and locally. • Children placed out of borough, who experience separation from family, education and support networks, increasing emotional and social disadvantage. • Families requiring intensive early help and safeguarding support, reflected in ILACS findings and national reform of children’s social care. <p>The CSAM is designed to address these inequalities by improving early intervention, placement stability and access to consistent local services.</p>

E	Will/Does the implementation of the policy result in different impacts for protected groups and the general population of the organisation?	<p>Yes, but the impacts are positive and proportionate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people (protected by age) are the primary beneficiaries through improved accommodation, stability and support. • Disabled children, including those with SEND, benefit from placements designed to support specialist and therapeutic needs. • Care leavers (often facing compounded disadvantage) benefit from supported accommodation pathways reducing homelessness, instability and exclusion. • Staff benefit from fairer, safer, and more inclusive working environments without adverse impacts on any protected group. <p>No adverse or discriminatory impacts on protected characteristics are identified. The policy explicitly aligns with duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty.</p>		
		Yes	No	Explain your reasons
	Disability	x		
	Sexual Orientation	x		
	Sex	x		
	Gender Reassignment	x		
	Race	x		
	Marriage/Civil Partnership	x		
	Maternity/Pregnancy	x		
	Age	x		
	Religion or Belief			
	Others groups identified: i.e. socio economic status; neurodiversity etc			As above
<p>If you have answered 'Yes' to any of the questions, then you are required to carry out a full Equality Impact Assessment – please go to section 2</p>				

Section 1: Result of initial Equality Impact Assessment

The above-named policy has been considered and does not require a full equality analysis	
Initial EIA Carried out by:	
Date:	
Agreed by: Equality and Diversity Coordinator: (QA)	
Date:	

Section 2 – Full Equality Impact Assessment

1a. Does the policy impact differently on people from any of the Protected Groups?				
	Negative Impact	Positive Impact	Neutral Impact	Please describe the impact for each of the protected groups and outline the evidence for your conclusion
Disability		X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A significant proportion of children in care have disabilities, additional needs, or mental health difficulties, whether formally diagnosed or not. • CSAM enables the development of local, high-quality residential and supported accommodation, reducing inappropriate placements that fail to meet complex needs. • Improved service delivery spaces and co-location support multi-disciplinary working (social care, health, SEND, education), improving assessment, consistency of care, and outcomes for disabled children. • Reduced placement moves and outofborough placements lessen disruption, which disproportionately impacts disabled children. • Consideration of design to meet accessibility and additional needs will be made where required
Sexual Orientation		X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSAM does not differentiate service access based on sex. Both boys and girls benefit equally from improved placement quality, stability, safeguarding, and local provision. • Improved early intervention and prevention services particularly benefit children at risk of exploitation, abuse, or placement breakdown, regardless of sex. • LGBTQ+ children and young people face higher risks of rejection, mental ill^hhealth and placement instability. Smaller, local provision allows for safer environments and tailored emotional support. • No adverse gender-based impacts identified.
Sex		X	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSAM does not differentiate service access based on sex. • Provision will be inclusive of all genders, with careful matching and safeguarding arrangements

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both boys and girls benefit equally from improved placement quality, stability, safeguarding, and local provision. • Improved early intervention and prevention services particularly benefit children at risk of exploitation, abuse, or placement breakdown, regardless of sex.
Gender Reassignment		X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transgender and gender questioning young people can be particularly vulnerable to instability, bullying, and mental health risk. • CSAM supports safe, stable, local placements and improved professional environments that enable more responsive, person-centred support. • Reduced reliance on emergency or distant placements lowers the risk of inappropriate or unsafe living arrangements. • No adverse impacts identified.
Race		X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are disproportionately represented in the care system nationally. • Local placements help maintain cultural identity, family contact, faith links, and community connections, which are often disrupted by out-of-borough placements. • Improved early help and family-based interventions support equitable access to services across communities. • CSAM contributes to reducing structural inequalities linked to care experience.
Marriage and Civil Partnership			X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This protected characteristic is not relevant to the scope, delivery or beneficiaries of the CSAM. • No differential impact identified.
Maternity/ Pregnancy		X	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young parents and expectant care leavers benefit from local supported accommodation, stronger transition planning, and access to community health services. • Improved family-focused service delivery spaces support safeguarding, parenting support, and early intervention for young families. • No adverse impacts identified.

				<p>Pregnancy and Maternity</p> <p>Neutral / limited impact with mitigation</p> <p>At this time, it is unknown if all provision will be designed to to accommodate pregnancy or to support young parents and babies. As such, part of the proposal may not directly provide dedicated accommodation or specialist parenting support for this group.</p> <p>Young people who become pregnant or who are parents would be assessed on an individual basis. Where their needs cannot be met safely or appropriately within the proposed provision, alternative suitable accommodation and support would be identified in line with statutory duties and safeguarding responsibilities.</p> <p>Overall, while all this proposal may not directly meet the needs of pregnant young people or young parents, no unlawful discrimination is identified, and appropriate mitigations are in place.</p>
Religion or Belief		X	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local placements enable children and young people to continue participation in faith communities, religious practices, and culturally appropriate support. • Reduced out-of-area placements limit unnecessary disruption to religious observance and belief systems. • No negative impacts identified.
Age		X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people are the primary beneficiaries of CSAM. • The strategy improves placement sufficiency for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Children in care ○ 16–18-year-old care leavers ○ Young people aged 18+ requiring supported independent living • Improved stability, continuity of care, and better transition pathways reduce long-term negative life outcomes associated with care experience. • Any differential treatment by age is lawful, proportionate, and justified by statutory duties.

Socio economic status		X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children entering care and care leavers are overwhelmingly from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. • CSAM reduces inequalities by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Preventing escalation into crisis placements ○ Supporting early intervention and family support ○ Reducing homelessness risk for care leavers • Improved local provision supports access to education, employment, training and health services.
Other impacted groups i.e., neurodiversity		X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSAM actively advances equality of opportunity, particularly for children who experience multiple and overlapping disadvantages. • No adverse or discriminatory impacts on protected characteristics have been identified. • Impacts are positive, proportionate, and aligned with the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010).

General Duty

<p>1b. Now consider and detail below how the policy impacts on elimination of discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advances the equality of opportunity and promotes good relations between groups. Where there is evidence, address each protected characteristic (Disability, Sexual Orientation, Sex, Gender Reassignment, Race, Marriage/Civil Partnership, Maternity/Pregnancy, age, Religion and Belief)</p>	
<p>Eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation</p>	<p>Age</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminating discrimination: The proposal directly addresses the specific needs of children and care-experienced young people through age-appropriate provision. <p>Disability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminating discrimination: Local provision reduces indirect discrimination associated with distant placements that limit access to services, education and family contact. Reasonable adjustments will be made in line with individual needs. <p>Sexual Orientation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminating discrimination: Robust policies and staff training promote zero tolerance to homophobia, biphobia and discrimination. <p>Sex</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminating discrimination: Placement decisions and care planning will be gender-informed, addressing sex-specific risks such as exploitation or violence. <p>Gender Reassignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminating discrimination: Ability to influence policies that promote dignity, confidentiality and respect for gender identity, with zero tolerance for transphobic behaviour. <p>Pregnancy and Maternity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminating discrimination: No unlawful discrimination is identified; suitability is based on ability to meet needs safely and appropriately.
<p>Advance equality of opportunity</p>	<p>Age</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advancing equality of opportunity: Supported transitions to adulthood reduce risks associated with living away from local areas, abrupt moves and poor outcomes. <p>Sexual Orientation</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advancing equality of opportunity: Smaller, stable, local placements enable tailored emotional support and safer disclosure. <p>Sex</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advancing equality of opportunity: Both girls’ and boys’ benefit from stable, local placements with equitable access to education, health and support services. <p>Race (including ethnicity and nationality)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advancing equality of opportunity: Care planning will consider cultural identity, language needs and community links.
<p>Promote good relations between groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive environments encourage acceptance and respect among children and staff. • Clear boundaries, safeguarding practices and staff training support respectful relationships • Staff training supports understanding and inclusive practice, reducing stigma. • Culturally competent practice and diverse staffing promote inclusion and mutual respect. • Clear communication and planned transitions reduce stigma and instability. • Stable placements support positive peer and staff relationships.

2. Engagement and Involvement

<p>How have you engaged stakeholders in gathering evidence?</p>	<p>Add information about ICENI engagement</p> <p>When working with our proposed partners in developing our Residential Children's Home, children in care and care leavers have been involved in the design or both the service and the property specification. ‘We are Juno’ CIC also employ experts by experience, who have been engaged in service design and delivery.</p>
<p>Have you engaged stakeholders in consulting on the policy proposals?</p>	<p>What documents did ICENI review</p>

For each engagement activity, please state who was involved, how and when they were engaged, and the key concerns/issues identified.

As above.

3. Action Plan

The following action plan should be completed if the EIA exercise has identified that additional steps need to be taken to address adverse outcomes for particular protected groups, maximise positive impact or to collect additional evidence to inform the EIA.

Action	Target Date for Completion	Person Responsible	Outcome

4. Making a decision

An EIA has been undertaken on this policy and meets the requirements of the General Equality Duty. The following decision has been taken: (please tick one box)

	Approve – No major change	
	Adjust the policy	
	Continue with the policy	

Stop and remove the policy	
---	--

5. Sign off and review:

When the actions listed above have been completed a copy of this form should be sent to Equality and Diversity Coordinator.

Full EIA Carried out by:	
Date:	
Equality and Diversity Coordinator: (QA)	
Date:	
Manager:	
Date:	
Date Passed to Governors/Directors:	

Review Date

Unless the policy is reviewed before the date below, the next EIA will be carried out in
.....
(A maximum of 3 years from date of completion as shown on this template)

REPORT TO:	Executive Board
DATE:	16 April 2026
REPORTING OFFICER:	Executive Director of Adult Services
PORTFOLIO:	Adult Social Care / Health and Wellbeing
SUBJECT:	Health and Social Care Policy and Performance Board Scrutiny Topic Group 2025 – Mental Health
WARD(S)	All

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To introduce the final report for the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Topic Group for 2025 and confirm the chosen topic for the 2026 scrutiny review.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION:** That

- 1) The report be noted;
- 2) Members ratify the action plan for implementation.

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 **Scrutiny Topic Review – Mental Health**

- 3.1.1 Scrutiny Topic Reviews are conducted annually by Policy and Performance Boards (PPB) and the Health and Social Care PPB identified for 2025/6 that they wishes to scrutinise Mental Health services across the borough. As a result the Topic Group was formed and a topic brief was agreed in the June 2025 PPB meeting.
- 3.1.2 A key focus of the Scrutiny Topic Review was to examine the services delivered by Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust. The Trust has been commissioned in Halton or the past few years following the of departure of 5 Boroughs Partnership NHS Foundation Trust from the region.
- 3.1.3 The first meeting of the Scrutiny Topic Group was in August. It was intended that it would start in July, however speakers for the meetings could not be secured.
- 3.1.4 The Scrutiny Topic Group meetings therefore took place between August and November, with the final draft being agreed at the final meeting of the Group on 4th December, and then being signed off by

the PPB on 10 February 2026. The agreed final report is given at Appendix One.

- 3.1.5 Councillor Eddie Dourley chaired the Scrutiny Topic Group and Members were asked to attend as part of an open invitation across the duration of the scheduled sessions.
- 3.1.6 Activity during the Scrutiny Topic Review revolved around presentations being brought to Members from different areas of service, in order for them to build a full picture of mental health responses across the borough.
- 3.1.7 Further to this Members additionally conducted two site visits during the Review, one to the SPACE Café in Runcorn and the other to The Brooker Centre. Both visits have comprehensive write-ups in the final report.
- 3.1.8 The Board agreed 14 recommendations in its November meeting, following the final presentation. This has been written up into an action plan, for which a small task and finish group will be formed with representation from the Council, the Integrated Care Board and Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust.
- 3.1.9 The subject of Mental Health covered a wide range of areas and vast amount of information. As such, it's not been possible to give all aspects of performance and related data within the report. Instead the presentations given are incorporated into the report appendices. The report covers the discussions and contributions shared at the Topic Group meetings.
- 3.1.10 The main body of the report gives an overview narrative of services, and key points pulled out of discussions by the Topic Group as broken down by the following headings:
- Social Care duties under the Mental Health Act 2007
 - Community-based responses and primary care services
 - Crisis response, including suicide prevention
 - Secondary care, including bed-based services
 - Specialist care services
 - Children and Young People's services
- 3.1.11 This is tied together with an introduction and conclusion, along with the usual sections to include in the Topic Review report – Purpose of the report, Membership of the Topic Group, etc.
- 3.1.12 Executive Board are requested to review the report for final sign off, and to give support for implementation of the action plan. In particular, please note that the recommendation that outlines mandatory e-learning on suicide awareness has been found to involve potential costs. As such training provision internal to Halton

3.2 Borough Council is to be explored in the first instance. This is further set out in section 5.1 of this report – Financial Implications.

3.2.1 **Scrutiny Topic for 2026**

At the Health and Social Care PPB meeting on Tuesday 10th February 2026 the Scrutiny Topic Review for 2026/27 was considered and Members. Three options were deliberated and Members have chosen to look at:

3.2.2 Ageing Well – Public Health lead on a programme of activity and intervention to support people in later life across the borough. During 2025 they re-modelled their intervention approach to develop the ‘Stronger for Longer’ programme, offering up to 12-weeks of support for those aged 55 and over, to access their community and improve both their mental and physical wellbeing.

3.2.3 Following agreement on a Scrutiny Topic Review theme a Topic Brief will be formulated, in discussion with the Review Chair. This will further be presented and ratified by the Board prior to the Topic Group being formed.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The recommendations from the 2025 Scrutiny Review involve activity that needs to be undertaken by the Council, through the Integrated Care Board, and by Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust. As such, a small task and finish group will be formed to ensure all action are being taken forward.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Initially, there were thoughts to be no financial implications for the recommendations to be implemented. However, in order to monitor the Zero Suicide Alliance Suicide Awareness as a mandated e-learning module for all staff it would require us to purchase the sharable content for our e-learning platform. This would cost of £7,200 for a three year license.

As a first port of call, and as mentioned against the recommendation, the Council has an internal training offer around suicide awareness. As such, we will look to further explore this method of delivery prior to considering this costed option.

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

All reports must include all of these headings with details of any implications for the Council's priorities. If there are none state 'None'

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

The Scrutiny Topic Review report aims to look at areas of provision and access points for mental health services across the borough, with the intension of supporting population wellbeing.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

The Scrutiny Topic Review report identified a number of partner organisations involved in the delivery of mental health services, and emphasizes their key role in preventing and delaying the need for greater intervention.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

There is a specific focus Children and Young People' mental health needs in the report and the services on offer to meet this need.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

The report identifies the need to be vigilant of different minority groups and cultural requirements in the delivery of mental health services.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

None identified.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

Community and voluntary organisations are highlighted as playing a pivotal role in keeping people well across the borough.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 None identified.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The report identifies the needs to reach different groups and

communities within the borough. Actions aligned to the recommendations around this are incumbent on Mersey Care and respective partners.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None identified.



Health and Social Care Policy & Performance Board

Scrutiny Review of Mental Health Support

Report December 2025

1. Purpose of the report

The purpose of the report, as outlined in the initial topic brief (Appendix One) is to:

- Understand who uses the services and why.
- Understand how the service ensures equality of access and outcomes for all sections of the community, including minority or marginalised groups.
- Understand referral/access pathways, including any barriers.
- Understand key performance indicators, outcomes and service user experience.
- Understand how each of the services interact with the wider health and social care landscape.
- Understand the level of capacity and demand within the services and highlight emerging issues through trend analysis.
- Understand how the service is meeting current demand and what it predicts future demand will look like and how it will meet that demand.
- Understand any opportunities, challenges or emerging issues faced by the services.
- Highlight any innovative work taking place to improve performance, outcomes and service user experience.
- Make recommendations as to how services can further improve performance, outcomes and service user experience.

2. Policy and Performance Board (PPB)

This review was commissioned by the Health and Social Care PPB and the topic was formally adopted at the July 2025 meeting.

This report will be presented to the Health and Social Care PPB in February 2026. The report will also be presented to the Adults Directorate Senior Management Team, Executive Board and boards or committees of stakeholders, as appropriate.

3. Membership of the Topic Group

An open invitation to participate in the scrutiny group was made to all Members of the Health and Social Care PPB. The table below details which Members and officers participated in the review:

Elected Members: Councillor Eddie Dourley (Chair), Councillor Colin Hughes, Councillor Katy McDonagh, Councillor Louise Goodall, Councillor Norman Plumpton-Walsh, Councillor Sandra Baker, Councillor Sian Davidson, Councillor Stan Hill.

Halton Borough Council: Helen Moir – Head of Services, Independent Living and Safeguarding; Nicola Hallmark – Senior Service Development Officer

The Schedule of Activity (Appendix Two) shows the visiting presenters who contributed to the topic review.

The Chair would like to extend thanks to all those who took the time to participate in this review, in particular to Tim McPhee, Associate Director Integration, Transformation and

Partnerships for Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust, who attend most meetings and delivered a number of the presentations on behalf of the Trust.

4. Methodology Summary

This Scrutiny Review was conducted through the following means:

- Regular meetings of the Scrutiny Review Topic Group between August and December 2025
- Verbal and presentations being made by key stakeholders and partners in the delivery of mental health, and related services across the borough (details of the presentations are embedded into the Appendices of this report)
- The provision of further supporting information and signposting to relevant websites
- Site visits to the SPACE Café in Runcorn and The Brooker Centre, based at Halton Hospital in Runcorn.

5. Introduction

5.1 Objectives and scope of the Scrutiny Review

The Halton Borough Council Corporate Plan 2024-2029 sets out one of its six strategic priorities as: “Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence. “ Within this priority the Council would further like to see ‘improved mental health wellbeing in Halton’.

The Health and Social Care Policy and Performance Board have chosen this year’s Scrutiny Topic Review in-line with this ambition to look at how existing mental health provision is meeting the current demand, and to question how future demand will be met. The Board wanted to look at access to mental health services for both adult and children and young people, and wished to better understand how equality of access to services is achieved for marginalised and minority groups.

Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust (henceforth referred to as Mersey Care) is commissioned by the Integrated Care Board (ICB) as the main delivery agent for the majority of community mental health services in Halton. As such, they played a key role in conveying the current position of services and in communicating their ambitions for the future of Halton’s mental health services.

Within the Topic Group meetings, Members heard from other partners and stakeholders who play their own significant part in achieving a collaborative approach to mental health needs across the borough.

The range and breadth of services in support of mental health is extensive and it has not been possible to cover all provision in depth within the Topic Group. As such this report will draw on the presentations given, discussion held and other information sources shared to extract conclusions that will not necessarily be transformative but will go some way to enhancing services for mental health across the borough.

5.2 Mental Health and Mental Health Services in Halton

The term 'mental health' is widely used to define overall wellbeing. It is used to describe our psychological and emotional state as well as how we are impacted on by the different aspect of our lives such as family dynamics, careers prospects and status, our financial position and many other forces. Mental health is the way we feel, think and act on a day-to-day basis.

For the purposes of examining mental health services and provision within this report, the term will, for the most part, be used in its medical sense in relation to diagnosable conditions such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, psychosis, schizophrenia, bipolar effective disorder, personality disorders, eating disorders, dementia and a number of other disorders of the mind requiring therapeutic interventions.

It is to be noted that this Topic Group Review and report does not cover the services and support for neurodiversity or learning disability. While these fall within the commissioning requirements of the ICB they are not within scope of this Review.

Data on the prevalence of mental ill health in Halton was not specifically shared within the presentations to and discussion of the Topic Group. Instead, data and statistics focused on delivery of service provision, including service uptake and access/response rates, and these will be further explored in the various sections of this report.

For an indication into the impact of mental ill health, and associated determinants, we need to look into broader, existing population details for the borough.

[Halton's Health Profile](#) shows that:

- 17% of the population are diagnosed with depression – age 18+
- There are 170 hospital admissions for self-harm in 10-24 year olds per year
- There are 40 hospital admissions for mental health conditions in under 18s per year

This is further impacted by a range of health determinants, including:

- 30% of the population live in the 10% most deprived area in England
- 61% of the population have their day-to-day activities limited by disability or long-term health conditions
- 14% of households in the borough are fuel poor
- There are 25 admissions for substance misuse in 15-24 year olds per year
- There are 1,251 admissions for alcohol-specific conditions in one year

While these are just extracts from a much wider picture they indicate a need for a good mix of mental health services in the borough. Moreover, they signify a requirement for collaborative, multi-agency working practices, which were found to be in place across the provision that was examined.

The delivery of mental health provision in Halton involves both formal and informal services, initiatives and activity. These, in turn, fall to a number of agencies and organisations including those delivering statutory provision and those providing

support across the community. Key players in mental health that make up the delivery landscape include health services, social care services, and the community and voluntary sector.

This report will include a section on social care functions, and in particular those duties under the Mental Health Act 2007. However, as initiated by the Topic Brief, greater focus will be placed on health services, predominantly those within the remit of the ICBs commissioning function, and therefore those delivered by Mersey Care as the principally appointed provider for mental health services in the borough.

6. Social care duties under the Mental Health Act 2007

Halton Borough Council's Adult Social Care Services has a dedicated Mental Health team. Steve Westhead, Principal Manager of the team opened the Scrutiny Topic Review with a presentation which looked at some of the mental health conditions that acute services deal with in Halton, as well as giving an overview of the functions and statutory duties which fall under his team.

The session enabled Members to gain context of Halton Borough Council's Social Services operational delivery against mental health needs prior to them looking into the health-based services on offer, which was set out as the main focus of the Topic Group.

Steve apprised Members of the team's social work responsibilities and the team make up, including three social workers which are co-located with the Later Life and Memory (LLAMS) service at The Brooker Centre. The support offered within the social work function aligns with the Council's Care Act 2014 duties.

Alongside this, the Mental Health team has a specific duty as part of the Council's statutory responsibilities under the Mental Health Act 1983, as amended in 2007 to make sufficient provision for the borough in relation to the role of an Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP).

The AMHP role is open to any qualified professional (nurses, occupational therapists, psychologists, etc) as an additional qualification but Steve explained that it tends to be taken up by social workers, and therefore managed within the team.

Members heard that an AMHP plays a vital role under the Mental Health Act (MHA), being responsible for making applications for detention of individuals needing hospital treatment, together with ensuring that the Act and its associated Code of Practice are followed correctly.

It is the AMHP's duty, when two medical recommendations have been made, to decide whether or not to make the application for the detention of the person who has been assessed under the MHA, also known as sectioning. This includes considering the correct legal frameworks (Mental Capacity Act, including Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards), including alternatives to admission, ensuring that the patient is involved, and identifying and involving their nearest relative.

AMHPs have a designated set of powers under the MHA which include:

- The power to make an application for compulsory admission to hospital under Sec.2, Sec.3 or Sec.4
- The power to make an application for guardianship under Sec.7
- The power to convey the patient to hospital or to authorise others to do so
- The power to enter and inspect premises – other than a hospital - where someone is not receiving proper care Sec.115.
- The power to apply for a warrant to search for and remove patients or persons living alone in need of care under Sec.135(1)

They have a duty to:

- Interview the patient “in a suitable manner” (Sec 13(2). The duty to respond to a request by a Nearest Relative (NR) to assess someone under the MHA (Sec.13(4))
- Consult the patient’s Nearest Relative when considering a Sec.3 (or guardianship) If the NR unreasonably objects you may have to take to NR to court.
- Inform the patient’s Nearest Relative when detaining under Sec.2
- Interview a person removed to a "place of safety" by police under S.136
- Consider an application for a patient to be made subject to Supervised Community Treatment under Sec.17A

In support of this function Steve explained the need to work in partnership with health services, particularly in relation to acute admission. He spoke about Mersey Care’s expansion into Halton, and on being asked, expressed a strain on what Halton-based beds in The Brooker Centre. These are part of a wider pool of provision and are allocated regionally according to need. Steve said that this could mean that Halton patients are treated in St Helens or Knowsley or elsewhere in the region. He talked further about the impact not just on social care teams, to visit and assess, but on families, and their ability to offer on-hand support. He summed up that while the unification with Mersey Care has brought some additional resource, it has also brought some challenges.

Steve gave Members insight into some other community-based resources across the borough through partner organisations. He also spoke of the Council’s Mental Health Outreach Team, who provide short-term structured support to those with an assessed mental health need who may have social needs impacting on them and who might go into further crisis without early intervention and support.

Conclusions

- The Council play a key role in ensuring that legislative duties are delivered upon. The MHA places a responsibility on adult social care services that requires resource, and that resource can easily be stretched with additional burden e.g. in-patient placements outside of the immediate area.

- It is recognised that strong joint working relationships across social care, health and other partners is key to maintaining a throughput of provision.

7. Community-based responses and primary care services

Commissioning for Primary Care services, primarily delivered through GP surgeries, falls within the remit of the Integrated Care Board (ICB). One of the issues Members were keen to consider within the Scrutiny Topic Review was whether there are alternatives to accessing GP surgeries for mental health needs. Evidence presented showed that GPs have a role to play in supporting people with mental health needs but they are not the only port of call, and don't necessarily have to be the first.

Members learned that GPs can support management of mild to moderate mental illness and refer on to the specialist services as needed. Within the borough, Mental Health Practitioners are funded by both Primary Care Networks (Widnes and Runcorn) to support patients at the fringe between primary and secondary care, and will support transitions between services.

GPs are responsible for annual health checks for those on their register with Severe Mental Illness (SMI) – bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, psychosis, etc. The ICB additional commission a Wellbeing Nurse team through the Bridgewater Health Care NHS Trust to support practices with these checks. The national target for these checks on a rolling 12-month period is to achieve a 60% uptake. As at April 2025 Halton achieved 67%.

Details were given of services which sit alongside GP provision which don't require GP referral. This included ICB commissioned service *We Connect*, provided by Wellbeing Enterprise. Wellbeing Enterprises were not available to present to the Board during the Topic Group but supplied a briefing (at Appendix Three - 6 November 2025) on their offer. Members were told, by the ICB, that a recent evaluation of *We Connect* established a strong return on investment, equating to a social value of between £46.67 and £74.68 for every £1 spent.

The ICB further commission Talking Therapies, provided by Mersey Care. Again the service doesn't require GP referral, and it provides psychological therapy via a stepped care model for patients with anxiety, depression, phobias and PTSD. Members heard that this provision can be accessed in different ways, including in-person sessions, one-to-one support, group sessions, as well as through guided or self-led on-line therapy. Access targets following referral were mostly being met. Members were advised that face-to-face and one-to-one support could take longer to access. An improvement plan is in place to achieve targets, including plans to centralise recruitment to the service and grow a pipeline of talent.

With regard to Talking Therapies, Members were made aware that the service has, more recently, been opened up in Halton to 16-18 years old. It had previously been an 18+ service in the borough but this aligns it to other areas.

Outside of NHS services Members heard throughout the Scrutiny Topic Review about a range and breadth of community based services aimed at supporting people's

mental health and wellbeing. A number of these were learned to be part of Council services – informal support at community centre and libraries, mental health walks through Active Halton, courses available through the Adult Learning Team and provision through the Health Improvement Team, who additionally maintain a Council webpage to signpost the public to a wide assortment of support: [How can I seek & get help for a mental health problem?](#)

Further access points for support with mental health and wellbeing are commissioned by the Council, including services through Halton Carers Centre, Age UK Mid Mersey, Citizen's Advice Bureau, The British Red Cross, the Integrated Sensory Support Service, Change Live Grow (CGL), to name a few.

Members felt the voluntary and community sector play a significant role in supporting people on a day-to-day basis with their overall wellbeing, and this was reflected in a site visit to the SPACE café in Runcorn – details given on the next page.

Further resources are discussed on the accompanying presentation slides embedded into the Appendices of this report.

Conclusions

- Community and GP support was felt to be plentiful, however Members didn't always feel that the public are aware of the opportunities out there.
- Members were pleased that clear links are being made between physical and mental health needs.
- No specific or wasteful duplication was found in community and GP provision for mental health, however Members felt that some of the seldom heard and seldom seen communities could be better served.
- Members considered those services closest to the community, delivered in people's neighbourhoods, and would like further consideration to be given to how they can be incorporated into the roll-out of neighbourhood models of care to ensure a joined-up offer is made available.

Site Visit: Despresso Club – SPACE Café, Runcorn

16 October 2025

Members were keen, as part of the Scrutiny Topic Review, to better understand local services and what they mean to those who use them.

As a valued community resource in Runcorn Town Centre, the SPACE Café was chosen for a site visit.

Members attended a Thursday evening session of the venue's Despresso Club which offers designated sessions for those with low mood, those feeling lonely, or those who just want to talk, to drop in and have a brew, connect with others and gain access to any further resources they might need.

The Club runs on a Tuesday lunchtime and a Thursday teatime and is open to all. There are regular members who have formed friendships and those who just drop by. Hot and cold drinks are provided free of charge to make it accessible to all.

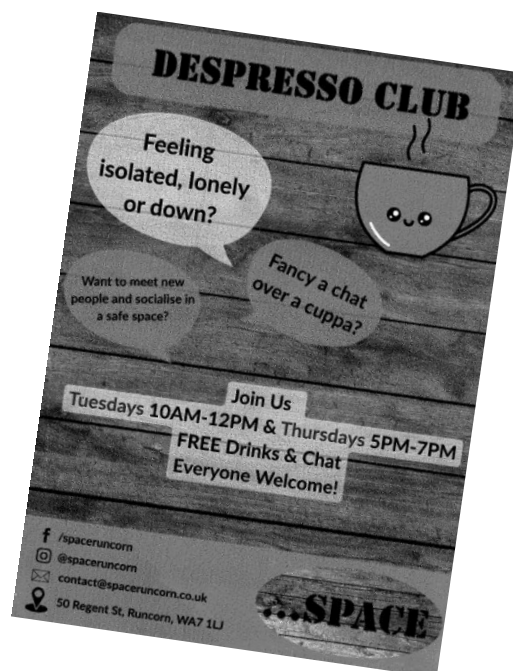
At each session there are trained Mental Health Ambassadors, from a small pool of volunteers, who are on-hand to support people, to get them talking and to signpost them to other services and support as needed.

On a day-to-day basis the café runs as a Community Interest Company, open Tuesdays to Saturdays between 10am and 2pm. The Café offers an open and inviting atmosphere for people who come for food and drink, and Mental Health Ambassadors are on-hand during these times also. Any profit from the Café are ploughed back into activities and events and these are wide and varied.

As well as the café area the building has a therapy room upstairs and an event room. Sessions on offer, across a busy calendar, include everything from yoga and crafts to guitar lessons and more focussed support groups. Some of these are funded, some are at cost and the Café runs an innovative 'pay it forward' scheme where patrons can add any amount to their food or drink bill to pay for others to have a drink, a meal or even attend an event.

Those spoken to during the visit found the sessions invaluable. Caroline, founder and manager of the venue said that the Despresso Club has been particularly well attended by men, who don't necessarily want to do the activity-based events. She expressed that it gives them space to just come and chat with others who might be in a similar place.

Member feedback following the visit was positive and the SPACE café was held up as a benchmark for good practice.



8. Crisis responses, including suicide prevention

The Scrutiny Topic Group expressed concern around whether there is sufficient provision for those in mental health crisis, and a full meeting was dedicated to examining this area.

Prior to this session, Members had already been presented with information on crisis responses commissioned by the ICB.

They were given an overview of the First Response Vehicles, which are a partnership commission with North West Ambulance (NWS) and Mersey Care, where ambulance response vehicles cover calls for those in need of immediate mental health support. The service was reported to be showing positive outcomes in terms of reduced conveyances to hospital in these situations.

Also, the ICB spoke about the All-Age Street Triage Services, where Mental Health Practitioners from Mersey Care work with the police across the community to lessen the strain on emergency services.

The ICB further indicated that there is a national requirement for them to commission a Mental Health Crisis Text Service by 31 March 2026. Work has commenced on implementation of this.

Mersey Care had outlined in previous presentation what their Urgent Care Responses looked like, including a Mental Health Triage and Response Team, their Core24 offer in Accident and Emergency Departments (A&E), and the role of their Crisis Home Treatment Team as the gatekeepers of mental health in-patients beds.

At the dedicated crisis response session, Mersey Care spoke about in greater detail about the relatively new position they've achieved with NHS England and the NHS 111 phonenumber service. All callers to 111 across the Mersey Care footprint (and sharing their location, where a smartphone is used) get a call direct option – Option 2 – where they can identify that they are in mental health crisis. This directs them to Mersey Care 24/7 All Age Crisis Line and allows them to access local services.

As an indication of use of the Crisis Line, Members were informed that 6,660 calls were received in May '23 (prior to linking with NHS 111) whereas 9,510 calls were received in 2024.

Mersey Care went on to present information on their Zero Suicide Approach, which entails a small Safe from Suicide Team who co-ordinate provision and deliver on the Trust's Suicide Strategy and associated workplan. The strategy maps against the National Confidential Enquiry into Suicide and Mental Health (NCISH) to ensure data is used correctly to understand and respond to the situation.

It was reported that NHS England guidance has recently been updated, and the Strategy will be further pulled in-line with this. One of the key updates is to no longer undertake risk stratification with those presenting with suicidal ideations as these can give a false indication. Mersey Care are to re-look at their tools and training as a result.

Areas of the Strategy being taken forward include:

- An immediate action plan to look to spot those 'at risk' in presenting data and proactively reaching out, giving suicide specific, short interventions. The Crisis Home Treatment Team will be used effectively for this and the Trust are devising new approaches through services to meet the recognised needs.
- Achieving a standard training offer for staff, including monitoring who's had suicide training
- Using data to better understand the offer
- Coproducing responses with experts by experience
- Devise a pathway of Essential Safety Elements, including a structure for 48-hour follow-up for those leaving in-patient services.
- Achieving a Gold Standard approach in proactive engagement with patients and through monitoring of data
- Working with people with long-term conditions. It was stated that people with long-term health conditions are much more likely to take their own life.
- Looking at transitions – between services – to ensure continuity of care is achieved
- Creating an Intensive Support Pathway for those at imminent risk
- Revising their Suicidal Ideations Pathway and Mental Health Crisis Pathway

It was discussed that those presenting with suicidal ideations are not often best served at Accident and Emergency Departments. Mersey Care are currently working in a pilot on Southport with a mental health crisis suite which is separate from A&E. This pilot would indicate the need for further roll-out across the region, and it was reported that the provision is being well-received at present.

Mersey Care are keen to offer opportunities for suicide prevention and reiterated the range and promotions of prevention and early interventions services across the borough. Given that the Talking Therapies service has recently been extended to 16-18 year old, the Trust has undertaken some proactive work with Riverside College during their autumn induction week.

Members spoke about the importance of GP Surgeries treating those who present with suicide thoughts and ideations with dignity, respect and urgency. It was considered that those with suicidal ideation needs parity of esteem with those presenting with an acute condition such as a heart attack.

Mersey Care gave further details that they are very vigilant to look after own staff who are dealing with these situations day in and day out and they have their own 24-hour crisis line for employees.

Mental Health Matters, who run a national resource website, have just won a contract with Mersey Care to provide a Mental Health Café across Warrington and Halton. Details of this were shared: [Warrington & Halton Support Hub: Mental Health Help](#)

During this dedicated session, Public Health were also invited to give their views on suicide prevention. Julia Rosser, Deputy Director for Public Health in Halton, gave an overview of local figures reflecting that Public Health have a statutory role in ongoing monitoring across the borough.

It was explained that the duties placed on Public Health are around annual completion of a Suicide Audit, however the team currently go further than that and undertaken 'real time' surveillance of suicides. This is achieved with ongoing intelligence from the Coroner's Office. To achieve a 'live' picture, the information shared is prior to inquests and works on the basis

on the information to hand. In this sense, it was made clear that this is based on an initial position.

The surveillance data enables Public Health to monitor themes and trends and take any immediate action identifiable. It was explained that this work is based on extremely sensitive information but can identify certain locations of risk, the need to target certain family groups, or circles of friends, schools, etc. with further prevention activity.

On occasions, where there is a 'cluster event', with more than one incident, Public Health will convene a multi-disciplinary team response to the situation, but this was reported to be few and far between.

From the data presented, it was explained to Members that the Pandemic had a big impact on figures. However, the impact then further rolled forward into 2021 and 2022 as some inquests were delayed and the official audit figures only reflect deaths deemed as suicide following an inquest.

Figures indicate that more men tend to take their own lives than woman and Members discussed that some specific provision has been made over the years for male mental health needs, including some work done through the Widnes Vikings.

Suicides by age groups were examined and it Members heard that targeted prevention work is aimed at different indicators. One of the more current risk factors coming through was reported to be around financial difficulties.

Leading on from Julia's presentation, Kate Bazley from the Health Improvement Team, which is the health promotion delivery arm of Public Health in Halton, gave an overview of her team's work.

As part of the Council's public web pages, Kate's team maintain a [Mental Health Info Point](#), with tools, resources and signposting to other access points for mental health support. They also undertake activities and interventions across the borough to offer support and training. This includes training for Halton Borough Council staff on stress management as well as suicide awareness.

The Health Improvement Team work to a local suicide prevention strategy. Due to the sensitive nature of the work this is an internal document that pick up themes from the Suicide Audits as well as the suicide surveillance. Members were apprised that the work picked up against the strategy is proactive but also responsive, and an example was given that the team are currently working to a new, national critical response framework.

The team run a number of groups, including a Men's group. This is a legacy from additional funding allocated during the pandemic. They also produce public information resources.

Members were keen to observe that the suicide statistics are only part of the picture and that every number represents a devastating loss to someone. They raised concerns around the impact of drink and drugs on suicide rates and Public Health reported that their commissioned contract with Change Grow Live (CGL) in the borough supports alleviate of this influence where possible.

Conclusions

- Members didn't feel that the NHS 111, Option 2 support was widely known. They also felt there was a raft of other information and advice points that could be further promoted.

- Members felt that Mental Health crisis is met with robust proactive monitoring and interventions but there is a need to continuously reiterate key messages.
- New developments were felt to be moving at pace and Members expressed that they would like to be kept updated of these
- It was agreed that equipped yourself with some simple knowledge and understanding (through training opportunities and awareness raising) could go a long way in effecting the outcomes for those in mental health crisis.
- It was acknowledged that the pandemic had a dramatic effect on suicide rates as well as increased mental ill health

9. Secondary care, including bed-based services

Secondary care for mental ill health revolves around those medical services which are a step up from community and primary care options. This can involve clinics and out patients services and specialist professional assessments as well as provision for bed-based services.

In terms of provision commissioned by the ICB, Members heard that this includes the following Mersey Care provision:

- Early Intervention Psychosis (EIP) – for patients aged 14-65 years experiencing a first episode of psychosis.
- Assessment Team - providing specialist assessment, advice and signposting for adults with moderate to severe symptoms of mental illness such as severe depression and anxiety and conditions like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.
- Recovery Team – focusing on strengths, goals and building resilience for patients with long-term conditions.
- Personality Disorder Service – working with patients with complex and severe Personality Disorders, reducing hospital admissions and preventing need for any out of are admissions.
- Individual Placement Support (IPS) – an employment support services integrated within community mental health teams to support people with severe mental health conditions to find and retain employment.

Members were informed that current improvement priorities for the ICB include maintaining oversight of service performance and standardising data information requests from Mersey Care across the Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System (ICS).

As regards to bed days the ICB commissions 14,890 adult in-patient bed days per year, comprising:

- 10,220 adult mental health bed days – Mersey Care
- 280 mental health Psychosis Intensive Care Unit (PICU) bed days (equating to 0.75 bed) – Mersey Care
- 3,650 Adult Mental Health rehabilitation bed (equating to 10 beds) across Halton and Warrington (with Alternative Futures) to patients detained under the Mental Health Act and to informal patients.

The ICB described a Mental Health Capacity and Flow Recovery Programme that will be operating throughout 2025/26 to improve mental health system flow across the system with an aim to increase the available bed capacity through reducing the number of people who are clinically ready for discharge. Mersey Care also highlighted steps that they take on a day-to-day basis to manage capacity and flow.

The impact of delayed discharges was further discussed and deficits around housing provision, particularly where aligned to MHA Section 117 duties*, were identified as a concern.

*Section 117 revolves around a joint responsibility between ICBs and Local Authorities to provide 'after-care' services to individuals discharged from hospital under qualifying mental health detentions.

It was reported that Halton currently has no patients in out of area secondary care beds.

Mersey Care further demonstrated their commitment to workforce planning as well as workforce resilience within secondary care services. They also spoke about patient experience and engagement within this area.

Some additional services under secondary care falls into more specialist areas. These are further explored in Section 10.

Members undertook a site visit to The Brooker Centre in Runcorn, as the main building-based provision for secondary mental health services in the borough - details given on the next page.

Conclusions

- While it is recognised that provision across the Mersey Care footprint has given Halton residents access to a wider offer, it was reiterated that any in-patient placements out of the borough place additional burden on other areas of services, including social care services (as also highlighted in Section 6 of this report).
- Similarly to the conclusions captured under Section 7 of this report, Members observed a good range of provision which was considered to have no specific overlap or duplication that would create inefficiencies. Likewise to Section 7, Members would like to ensure that different communities and cultures represented across Halton find these services accessible and inclusive.
- Consideration, again comparable to that in Section 7, was directed at community provisions and how this will map to plans for neighbourhood model of care, going forward. The collaborative approach to working across the borough were recognised by Members and are felt to be pivotal to assuring an integrated service offer into the future.
- Delayed discharges were noted as a concern, and the system pinch points surrounding this and related to the need for further supported housing provision.
- Members, in particular those who attended the site visit, applauded those involved in direct delivery of services and acknowledged their resilience.

Site Visit: The Brooker Centre, Runcorn

6 November 2025

The Brooker Centre is a dedicated mental health provision, based at the Halton Hospital site and is run by Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust. The team also have a satellite office in Widnes, which is used by the Recovery Team, LLAMS and is also a base for the Early Intervention Team.

Members visited the Centre as part of the Scrutiny Topic Review to consider the resource as a key Halton asset.

Members were initially met by Operations Manager, Katie, and had the opportunity to discuss different areas of provision and meet with different teams.

Kate gave an overview of the Centre, explained that Mersey Care have only operated from there in the past four years following the dissolution of North West Boroughs Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. She told Members of the changes during this time and spoke about the Centre being situated within the Mersey Care regional footprint, which she said brings with it both challenges but also opportunities.

She explained that the provision now runs to a 7-day working week, giving residents a more flexible service offer but also the adaptation is aimed at meeting increasing demand. Katie felt that overall improvements have been made to the patient journey since Mersey Care took on the provision.

LLAMS and Care Home Liaison

Members visited the Later Life and Memory Service (LLAMS) which is primarily aimed at supporting the ageing population in Halton and increases in memory-loss and dementia. However, it was put forward that the service are seeing increasing numbers of early on-set dementia and dementia and memory issues resulting from poor lifestyle choices, including alcohol and drug dependence.

Members were apprised of some recent investment that have been allocated to refurbish the LLAMS provision, and how this is supporting them to run therapeutic groups support sessions including Cognitive Stimulation Therapy.

LLAMS work in close partnership with other statutory services, including regular liaison with GP surgeries, and strong links with social care, with some co-located staffing. The service also has a dedicated Care Home Liaison function working across the borough with Nursing and EMI provision.

The LLAMS team liaise with and signpost to voluntary and community partners, including Alzheimer's Society (who have a contract with Halton Borough Council to run a Dementia Advisory service), Age UK Mid Mersey and Halton Carers Centre. They also make use of the ICB commissioned Admiral Nurses for those at later stages of their condition.

While LLAMS work is primarily with memory issues and dementia, Members were told about work being undertaken, as part of wider Mersey Care transformation programmes, to align services: This service will be for Adults over the age of 65 years old with both

Mental Health and Dementia diagnosis. Members were told that this would align their provision to the Mersey Care model across the region. Jaymie, the LLAMS team manager felt that staff have a lot of transferrable skills to offer with this change.

Recovery Service

The Recovery Service operates from the upper floor of the building and work is undertaken with patients following episodes of mental ill health, referrals are received from both Primary and Secondary services.

Katie was very proud of this area of service, saying that it isn't just about through put but looked at real, tangible outcomes for people. While there are patients who will have recurrences, Katie felt the service achieves clear recovery goals and said that the model developed is one of a few across the country that call themselves 'Recovery'.

The support offered within the Recovery Service includes psychological therapies and cases are triaged on a regular basis to look at step up/step down requirements as appropriate to need.

Within Halton, there is also Early Intervention Team, which are a specialist team that support service users with suspected or first episode of psychosis.

Mersey Care also have a CRHT 'Crisis Resolution Home Team' they are based in St Helens but support the community within Halton.

Members asked about Halton residents who are placed elsewhere within the Mersey Care footprint for in-patient treatment. Katie acknowledged that this happens, but reassured them that the team would look to re-patriate them if clinically appropriate closer to home.

Bridge and Weaver Wards

Members visited the in-patient wards at the Centre, offering a total of 33 beds as part of wider regional provision across Mersey Care services.

From previous discussion within the Scrutiny Topic Group, Members expressed concerns that provision covered a large area and that Halton patients sometimes had to be placed out of borough. Becky, as Matron, spoke to Members about the need to continually look at capacity and flow across the system, and while it was possible that a bed would not be available in-borough at the right time for a Halton resident they would be offered the choice to re-patriate as soon as a bed becomes available.

She described how coming under the Mersey Care footprint has reduced the need to buy bed space in other parts of the country (which had previously happened) so although there can be placements across the region, they are still within the local geography so far as possible.

Becky showed Members around the provision which has communal eating and activity areas as well as quiet space and single rooms and enclosed garden areas. She explained that funding has been sought to develop a new solitary suite with its own bathroom and more space. This would be a shared resource for the two wards with the existing space being reallocated. The suite is used for high intensity incidents where a person might need

separating from others on the Ward and Becky deems the new suite to be a positive move to offering more space to those in distress.

Patients have access to activities 7-days a week and the wards appeared to be well staffed. Becky explained that the team working on the Ward are only carrying two vacancies at present. She said that there had been a big push on recruitment more recently and this has helped relieve some of the pressures on team members. She described the environment as challenging but very rewarding and spoke about the staff supporting each other's mental wellbeing on a daily basis.

Members agreed that the work across the Centre was demanding and commended the commitment of a dedicated workforce.

All areas of service were keen to get patient feedback and run regular patient participation groups to capture views on an ongoing basis.

10. Specialist care services

Throughout the Scrutiny Topic Review Members were given details of the provision and services on offer across the borough. Within this, some dedicated, specialist mental health delivery was described as distinctive to certain cohorts of the population.

While not all of this is covered in this report, it is worth noting that these requirements are being considered and met.

Members were informed about:

Services aimed at meeting maternal and parental mental health needs – included

- The Silver Birch Hub, provided by Mersey Care, for women who have experienced distress, loss and trauma during pregnancy and birth.
- The Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Service (again provided by Mersey Care) for pregnant women and mum of infants up to 2 years of age who are currently experiencing complex or severe mental health problems, or have a history of, or risk of developing, these during the perinatal period.
- The Baby Infant Bonding Service – for parents expecting a baby or who have an infant aged up to 2 years old, who are having difficulty bonding and development their relationship with their child – delivered by Mersey Care.
- Parents in Mind – provided by the National Childbirth Trust for parents who require one-to-one or group support with mild or moderate health concerns who are antenatal or postnatal (up to the age of 2)

The ICB described the ongoing development of Family Hubs across Halton and how this has facilitated closer integration of services to support parents with mental health needs.

For Military Veterans in Halton, a service is provided by the Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust. This dedicated service is for those who have mental health problems that relate to their military service and offers a stepped model of care and support.

An Adult Eating Disorders Service, offering outpatient support, is provided by Cheshire Wirral Partnership across Warrington, Halton and Trafford.

It was demonstrated that future needs were being considered alongside current provision. Mersey Care spoke to Members about links between physical and mental health and how they are looking to join up these requirements. As a particular specialist concern, Mersey Care have designed a training module for staff working with Motor Neuron Disease (MND) patients around the associated suicide risks.

Conclusions

- Members felt that there was a good breadth of services but again felt these weren't always known about until people get to the point of needing them in crisis.
- It was thought that services were vigilant and responsive to future needs. Members raised concerns that Halton, as one of the smaller local authority area in the region, may get overlooked when it comes to new and innovative delivery opportunities.

11. Children and Young People's services

Members additionally convened a dedicated Scrutiny Topic Group meeting to look at mental health services for children and young people. Like the crisis response and suicide prevention session this was an opportunity to focus in on a specific area of provision.

The ICB had previously introduced a number of commissioned services to meet the mental health needs of children and young people across the borough. This includes:

Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), which is by Mersey Care. CAMHS also has a Crisis Response Team that provides risk assessment within 4 hours, brief interventions and home treatment as required.

Kooth, a digital mental health support service which offers counselling and wellbeing support, alongside self-help resources and signposting to community support. The service is aimed at young people aged 11-25.

Moving on 2gether Service, provided by Barnado's, and jointly commissioned with Halton Borough Council. This offers specialist therapeutic support and interventions for children in care (5-25 years) and care leavers.

Mental Health Support Team (provided by Mersey Care) which promotes early detection and prevention of mental health problems as well as direct interventions for pupils with mild or moderate mental health conditions in schools. It also helps strengthen links between schools and mental health service provision so that transitions between services are smooth.

At the dedicated meeting to look in more detail at the offer to children and young people, Mersey Care introduced the Thrive Model, which is a national framework aimed at improving mental health services for children and young people, and their families. Moving away from a tiered approach the framework instead emphasises a needs-led approach to providing tailored support based on the individuals' vulnerabilities and circumstances.

Mersey Care mapped some of their service and provision to elements of the Thrive Model to show how progression of need is determined and escalated through service.

Members alluded to difficult press image of CAMHS across the country and reassurance was given that service were improving. This included being shown graphs and statistics on waiting times for access to services.

It was conveyed that Mersey Care manage the situation closely and that senior managers meet on a weekly basis to manage referrals to CAMHS and look at what adjustments are needed if waiting times are not met.

The main referral route into children and young people's mental health services was shared as being through their GP. It was highlighted that this is not always needed and Members felt that public awareness should be raised around this.

Increasingly, however, referrals were seen to be coming through schools as the Mental Health Support Team become more embedded. It was explained that Mersey Care don't have funding to extend this model across all schools in the borough at present, and as a result they are working with those deemed to have the highest level of need.

Members heard that the schools service is helping to identify which service is best able to meet the presenting needs, and children and young people would be escalated to CAMHS as required. They were informed that the greater spread of services, including more access to lower intensity psychological therapies in places where the child or young person already is, is alleviated pressure on higher intensity services.

Moreover, the network of support for children and young people was explained to be much wider than Mersey Care service, currently including 13 different providers, and including a range of early interventions opportunities that previously didn't exist. This includes the Kooth digital service but also a good spread of community and voluntary service activities and options aimed at maintaining the wellbeing of children and young people.

Mersey Care alluded to the fact that, where children and young people did have a need to access CAMHS services, they are being seen more quickly than previously because of the range of other interventions on offer. This enables CAMHS to deal with more complex cases more quickly including referrals on to other services such as those dealing with eating disorders.

Regarding eating disorders, it was confirmed that some children and young people do require in-patient care and Mersey Care will work with acute trusts around admission for this and other children and young people's mental health admissions.

Members asked specifically about the age from which eating disorders are diagnosed and it was shared that this is generally between 10 and 11 years. They were told that before this age it could often be 'avoidant restrictive food intake', which falls under a different diagnostic classification as disordered eating (as opposed to an eating disorder).

The ICB and Mersey Care confirmed that they are currently looking to develop a best practice model for the region around adolescent eating disorder.

The approach to crisis response for children and young people's mental health needs has been altered over the past few years. It was explained that, previously, there was not a dedicated 24-hour service and this led to out of hours admissions. Now, the CAMHS Crisis Response Team have a 4-hour response time to work to, and can also be accessed (like services for adults) through the NHS 111, Option 2 line.

Members asked about equity of access to services and Mersey Care declared that there's likely to be gaps with reaching immigrant communities. They are further looking at the data on this, as well as devising appropriate responses including training for staff to understand and incorporate cultural needs as well as considering institutional inequalities.

It was recapped that the Talking Therapies service in Halton has now been extended to 16-18 year olds.

Further to hearing from Mersey Care about their own and wider provision for children and young people, the session devoted to this area was also attended by Barnado's, who run the Moving on 2gether scheme.

Nicola Dunn, from Barnado's, explained that the schemes sits within a framework of support and is aimed at those in care and care leavers. It predominantly therapy and mental health service-based and where children are under the age of 12 years old they use specialist play therapists as part of interventions.

The scheme works closely with other services, including referring on to CAMHS as needed, and the delivery team will run a monthly panel to look at what service is best placed to meet the person's needs.

Nicola explained that, in terms of the Thrive Model, the interventions through Moving on 2gether are at the upper end of needs.

Referrals to the scheme go through an Emotional Health and Wellbeing Panel run by the Council and the ICB as commissioners of the service and case holders for those in care. The team then work with Halton children within a 40 miles radius, dependant on placements but can reach out further if agreed.

The team will at times undertake training with foster parents, or will conduct Filial Therapy, where they work with the person's carer who in turn works with the child. They also offer training to residential homes and to social workers.

In terms of figures, the scheme saw 42 referrals in 2024/25:

- 28 – Looked After Children
- 9 – Care Leavers
- 5 – Foster Carers

A breakdown of these referrals by demographics was presented to Members as well as some primary reasons for referrals and some other reasons for referrals. Presentation slides also gave some positive feedback on outcomes of the service from those who've used it.

Conclusions

- It was noted that the range of support now in place appears to meet previous gaps.
- Members, again, highlighted that public awareness of access point for mental health support was insufficient.
- The mental health support being rolled out across schools was particularly commended and Members considered schools as a good place to have daily oversight of the behavioural and mood changes that might accompany mental ill health.
- It was also mentioned within discussions that a couple of Members on the Scrutiny Topic Review are also Governors at schools in the borough. Members recognised their own role in promoting mental health services across the borough.

12. Overall conclusions and recommendations to the Health and Social Care Policy and Performance Board

The activity undertaken by the Board to achieve the outcomes of the Topic Review uncovered a wide variety of services and provision for those with mental ill health. The information shared was thought-provoking and revealed that services have come a long way in the short time, and intensively so since the Covid Pandemic.

The Board felt that that strategic intentions and planned transformation of services taking place to meet future demands are moving the right direction, with a clear starting point centred on prevention and early intervention and the needs of the community. Their one concern was that the specific needs of Halton residents should be prioritised when it comes to delivery of local services, and they did not want to see Halton's population generalised into a regional offer.

Across provision Members saw a real commitment from the workforce, and praised all staff across services for their ongoing resilience in what they felt was a challenging but reward field. Members felt that the workforce strategies and pledges made by Mersey Care effectively represented future needs and determined that no further recommendations were needed in relation to workforce planning.

The Board recognised that supporting mental health needs is wider than service provision and in fact involves everyone. They identified that they have a key role to play in providing help to those in emotional and psychological distress as prominent members of the community.

As a result of the Scrutiny Review Members have made 14 recommendations.

They recommend that:

Recommendation	Thematic area	Responsibility	Timescale
Mersey Care and Halton Borough Council's Mental Health team re-institute regular meetings specific to monitor retention of patients in-borough.	Communication/ partnership working	Mersey Care / Halton Borough Council - Mental Health	To be set up by March 2026
<p>All agencies working to deliver mental health services, the ICB and Mersey Care in particular, should continue to monitor data and forecast demands in order to effectively allocate resources.</p> <p>They should look to bring any concerns to the Health and Social Care Policy and Performance Board as part of maintaining a systems approach.</p>	Forward planning/ Demand management/ Systems approach	ICB / Mersey Care	Ongoing
<p>Halton Borough Council conducts a series of targeted social media campaigns to promote the range and breadth of mental health support services across the borough, and to dispel some common myths (e.g. you don't need to see your GP to access services). In particular, the following are to be promoted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NHS 111, Option 2 • Access points for children and young people with mental ill health • Community-based services, such as the crisis café and the SPACE café 	Promotion/ Communication/ Awareness	Halton Borough Council – Marketing and Communication	Across 2026 – schedule of activity to be devised
<p>Members to act as Mental Health champions within their own wards, keeping themselves up-to-date with local service offers in order to signpost people appropriately and raising awareness of local websites promoting resources and support available, including Calm your mind Get back to a better place and Mental Health Info point</p> <p>Member to receive annual Member Seminars on Mental Health – Committee Services to work with relevant partners to deliver.</p>	Community support/ Awareness	Members / Member Services	Ongoing with annual updates

<p>The innovation and responsiveness to mental health needs across services, and Mersey Care's steer in that, is recognised and commended by Members.</p> <p>Members would like to be kept aware of the development of new services, including the progress towards implementing a Mental Health Crisis Text Service.</p>	<p>Innovation/ demand management/ Systems approach</p>	<p>ICB / Mersey Care</p>	<p>By March 2026, then ongoing</p>
<p>Members recognise that delayed discharge can revolve around housing needs and acknowledge the Council's new Housing Strategy as a positive opportunity for ensuring system wide approaches to the health and wellbeing of the public are achieved. Also, that there's work across the Liverpool City region to look at issues related to homelessness.</p> <p>Members urged relevant partners to continue to have open dialogue in relation to system pinch points and place-based responses.</p>	<p>Discharge flow/ systems approach/ Housing and community</p>	<p>Halton Borough Council / Mersey Care / ICB</p>	<p>In-line with roll- out of Halton Housing Strategy</p>
<p>Mersey Care, and respective partners, continue to work towards improving response rates and reducing wait times, as well as maintaining general throughput for services.</p> <p>Ongoing consideration to be given to ease of access to services for Halton residents and the share of resources being allocated to the borough.</p>	<p>Demand management/ partnership working/ system approach</p>	<p>Mersey Care / ICB</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Member would like to see the Mental Health Support Teams in schools model extended across the borough, and support opportunities to roll this out further to achieve 100% coverage.</p>	<p>Prevention/ Community support/ Demand management</p>	<p>ICB / Mersey Care</p>	<p>By March 2027 (dependant on funding)</p>
<p>Public Health to present the annual Suicide Audit to the Health and Social Care Policy and Performance Board, and to keep Members updated with any significant campaign activity to prevent suicide rates in Halton.</p>	<p>Systems approach/ Partnership Working/ Prevention</p>	<p>Halton Borough Council – Public Health</p>	<p>Annually</p>

<p>The Zero Suicide Alliance Suicide Awareness Training is to be mandated e-learning for Halton Borough Council staff and Elected Members. This is considered the minimum standard that should be achieved.</p> <p>((Halton Borough Council staff also have access to suicide awareness training delivered by the Health Improvement Team and this is promoted to staff on a regular basis.)</p>	<p>Workforce/ Awareness/ Prevention</p>	<p>Members / Halton Borough Council – Learning and Development</p>	<p>Implemented as Mandatory by March 2026</p>
<p>The Council's Health Improvement Team consider mental health and wellbeing alongside physical health needs and have strong links with health partners. Members called for this approach to further roll-out through neighbourhood models of care, and that all partners involved ensure that integrated working is utilised to achieve the best outcomes for the population of Halton.</p>	<p>Prevention/ Partnership working/ system approach</p>	<p>Halton Borough Council – Public Health</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Members would like to see improved access to mental health services for marginalised groups (such as settled refugees) and request that One Halton set data metrics within the implementation of neighbourhood models of care to ensure this is achieved.</p>	<p>Inclusion/ Communication/ Awareness</p>	<p>Mersey Care / ICB / One Halton</p>	<p>Across 2026 – schedule of activity to be devised</p>
<p>Members considered the current trajectory towards delivering prevention and low intensity services and feel this direction of travel should continue to be prioritised, particularly in consideration of how neighbourhood models of care are to be delivered.</p>	<p>Prevention/ Community</p>	<p>Halton Borough Council / Mersey Care / ICB / One Halton</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Members heard about maternal mental health services and support for parents with antenatal and postnatal mental health concerns. Members would like to see these services further promoted to the public via GP surgeries and within existing provisions targeted at families e.g. Family Hubs</p>	<p>Partnership working/ Communication</p>	<p>Halton Borough Council – Children and Family Services.</p>	<p>Across 2026 – schedule of activity to be devised</p>

These recommendations are felt to be realistic and practicable, and it is anticipated that a small Task and Finish Group should be set up to instigate the activity indicated. This group should have representation from Mersey Care, the ICB and Halton Borough Council, as a minimum.

Appendix One

Health Policy & Performance Board (HPPB) Scrutiny Review 2025/26

Topic Brief

Topic Title: Mental Health Support

Officer Lead: Helen Moir, Head of Service – Independent Living Services & Mental Health

Planned Start Date: July 2025

Target PPB Meeting: February 2026

Topic Description and Scope:

The 2025/26 scrutiny review for the Health Policy & Performance Board will look at Mental Health Support, specifically how existing provision is meeting current demand and responding to predicted demand, and equality of access to services for marginalised or minority groups, covering both Adults and Children and Young People Services.

This will include:

- The range and type of support and services for mental health available in Halton.
- Access to mental health support via primary care and during times of crisis.
- Assessment, diagnosis and treatment of mental health conditions.
- Community based mental health services.
- Inpatient mental health services and alternatives to hospital admission.
- The mental health crisis response.

Please note that services to support those with dementia, a learning disability and/ or autism are out of scope of this scrutiny topic.

The main focus of the topic will be on health services delivered by Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust. Predominantly this will be looking at services for adults but the topic will also consider Child and Young People's Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Through evidence presented at the scrutiny meetings, and/or site visits to services, the scrutiny group will develop an oversight of the key duties of each service, as well as the referral pathways, key operational practices and interface with other services. Through considering current performance, outcomes and service user feedback for each service area, the group will make recommendations on how services can further improve service user experience, outcomes and maximise performance.

Why this topic was chosen:

“Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right.”

(World Health Organization, 2022)

According to NHS England, one in four adults and one in 10 children experience mental illness. The NHS Long Term Plan makes a renewed commitment to improve and widen access to care for children and adults needing mental health support.

Mental health has a direct impact on an individual’s overall wellbeing and quality of life and is interlinked with physical health. It is essential that people have access to support at the earliest opportunity when they are experiencing difficulties with their mental health. It is also important for those with mental health conditions to be able to access appropriate treatment and ongoing support.

It is important for Health PPB Members to gain an understanding of the local services that are in place to support the mental health needs of the local community in order to ensure that Halton residents have access to the right support at the right time.

Key outputs and outcomes sought:

- Understand who uses the services and why.
- Understand how the service ensures equality of access and outcomes for all sections of the community, including minority or marginalised groups.
- Understand referral/access pathways, including any barriers.
- Understand key performance indicators, outcomes and service user experience.
- Understand how each of the services interact with the wider health and social care landscape.
- Understand the level of capacity and demand within the services and highlight emerging issues through trend analysis.
- Understand how the service is meeting current demand and what it predicts future demand will look like and how it will meet that demand.
- Understand any opportunities, challenges or emerging issues faced by the services.
- Highlight any innovative work taking place to improve performance, outcomes and service user experience.
- Make recommendations as to how services can further improve performance, outcomes and service user experience.

Which of Halton’s strategic priorities this topic addresses and the key objectives and improvement targets it will help to achieve:

Priority One: Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

Encouraging good quality health, wellbeing and social care, by involving everyone in our community. To support the people of Halton to feel safe, be active, happy and lead their best lives.

This scrutiny topic will contribute to the following objectives from the Corporate Plan 2024-2029:

- Offer easily accessible and integrated health care, advice and services from birth.
- Encourage preventative care and healthy lifestyles for the people of Halton throughout their lives.
- Support mental health services and tackle elderly isolation in Halton.

Nature of expected/desired PPB input:

This Member-led scrutiny review of Mental Health Support Services in Halton will be undertaken through a series of six monthly meetings at which Members will receive evidence presentations by the service areas identified. Service site visits will be arranged as applicable/requested. Members will make recommendations for inclusion in the Scrutiny Topic report to be presented to Health PPB and Executive Board.

The Children, Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board will be invited to attend the CAMHS session due to the overlap with their remit.

Preferred mode of operation:

- Meetings with/presentations from relevant officers from each of the services identified.
- Visit to services where applicable/requested.

Agreed and signed by:

Role	Signature	Date
HPPB Chair <i>(Cllr Eddie Dourley)</i>		
Lead Officer <i>(Helen Moir, Head of Service)</i>		

Appendix Two

Health Policy & Performance Board (HPPB) Scrutiny Review 2025/26: Meeting Schedule

Topic: Mental Health Support

Date/Time	Location	Theme	Speaker / Area of Focus
Thursday 21 August 2025 - 6-7.30/8pm	Civic Suite, Runcorn Town Hall	Evidence session 1: Social care responses to mental ill health: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health – Halton Borough Council 	Steve Westhead – Principal Manager – Mental Health Team <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of social care in supporting mental health needs • Overview of common mental health needs and conditions • Social Care interaction with the wider system
Thursday 4th September 2025 - 6-7.30/8pm	Civic Suite, Runcorn Town Hall	Evidence session 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICB context / overview (what they commission, performance, outcomes etc.) 	Philip Thomas and Karen Hampson – NHS Cheshire & Merseyside <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scene setting from the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and place-based partnership (One Halton) perspective Phil Watson – Head of Operations – Community Nicola Jones – Assistant Director of Nursing – Inpatients <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The scope of services which come under the umbrella of Mersey Care












Date/Time	Location	Theme	Speaker / Area of Focus
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mersey Care responses to mental health needs across the borough – teams, services and access points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Trust’s main objectives and current challenges. Provision local to Halton and how it operates in connection with the wider regional offer
Thursday 9th October 2025 - 6-7.30/8pm	Civic Suite, Runcorn Town Hall	Evidence session 3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on Children’s Mental Health 	Lisa Simpson – Children and Young People’s Mental Health Clinical Services Manager – Mersey Care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overview of Mersey Care services for children and young people, including CAMHS, the Mental Health Support Team (MHST) and specialist services e.g. eating disorders Nic Dunn – Children’s Service Manager – Barnado’s <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Covering the Moving On 2gether service – what it does, some service user feedback, service outcomes, and issues faced by Looked After Children and Care Leavers
Site Visit – 16 October 5-7pm	SPACE café – Despresso Club	Details sent to Members for sign-up	Attended by Cllr. Hughes and Cllr. Plumpton-Walsh
Thursday 23rd October 2025 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6-7.30/8pm 	Committee Room 1, Runcorn Town Hall	Evidence session 4: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on suicide prevention and crisis intervention 	Kate Bazley - Mental Health and Wellbeing lead <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Halton Health Improvement Team programmes in support of understanding suicide prevention Tim McPhee – Associate Director Integration, Transformation and Partnerships, Mersey Care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overview of Safe from Suicide service

Date/Time	Location	Theme	Speaker / Area of Focus
Site Visit – 5th November 10-11.30am	Brooker Centre	Details sent to Members for sign-up	
Thursday 6th November 2025 - 6-7.30/8pm	Civic Suite, Runcorn Town Hall	Evidence session 5: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback on site visits • Community Mental Health partners • Briefing – We Connect • Talking Therapies and primary care support • Consider draft recommendations for final report 	Kate Bazley - Mental Health and Wellbeing lead <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of the Halton Health Improvement Team in supporting community wellbeing • The team’s promotion of community-based services Briefing to be shared from Wellbeing Enterprises Tim McPhee – Associate Director Integration, Transformation and Partnerships, Mersey Care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further details of the Talking Therapies services and the role of the Mental Health Practitioner Service. All to discuss
Thursday 4th December 2025 - 6-7.30/8pm	Civic Suite, Runcorn Town Hall	Draft report presented for final comments Consideration of topics for next year’s scrutiny review	
January – date TBC		Report to Adults Directorate SMT	

Date/Time	Location	Theme	Speaker / Area of Focus
Tuesday 10th February 2026		Report to Health Policy & Performance Board	
Date TBC		Report to Executive Board	

Appendix Three

Presentations from the Scrutiny Topic Group

<p>21 August 2025</p>	<p> MH Presentation 21.08.2025.pdf</p>
<p>4 September 2025</p>	<p> ICB MH Commissioned Service</p> <p> Overview of Mersey Care Services Halton :</p> <p> MH Div Halton Health Policy Performance Bc</p>
<p>9 October 2025</p>	<p> CYPMHS Sep 25.pdf</p> <p> Halton MO2G Service Brief Presentation.pdf</p>
<p>23 October 2025</p>	<p> Suicide Prevention overview Oct 2025.pd</p> <p> Zero Suicide Halton Oct 25.pdf</p>
<p>6 November 2025</p>	<p> Mental Health Prevention overview N</p> <p> Talking Therapies Halton Scrutiny Topic</p> <p> WE Connect Briefing Paper HBC MH Scrutir</p>

REPORT TO:	Executive Board
DATE:	16 th April 2026
REPORTING OFFICER:	Executive Director Environment and Regeneration
PORTFOLIO:	Environment and Urban Renewal
SUBJECT:	Transport Infrastructure Update
WARDS:	Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Following the previous report in July 2023, this update gives details of the proposed investments in Halton's transport network. It is deliberately comprehensive to capture the integrated nature of the offer, the links between modes, and the relationship with Halton's growth. Board approval is sought for the 'transport pipeline' set out in Appendix 2 and 3.
- 1.2 Following the July 2024 general election, national transport policy has shifted. Core transport priorities are now framed around the creation of an integrated transport network that is cleaner, more inclusive, and reliable. Further devolution of funding is expected for strategic authorities, with a focus on growing the economy through infrastructure investment, decarbonising transport modes, improving user experience, and enhancing regional connectivity.
- 1.3 Funding reflects these national policy drivers and is distributed via the Department for Transport (DfT) to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCR CA) and ring-fenced for schemes within the City Region.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1. Members note Appendix 1, summarising completed scheme since the 2023 update.**
- 2. Members note Appendix 2, listing the schemes in delivery.**
- 3. Members approve Appendix 3, the "transport pipeline" of future schemes. (Approval includes design and feasibility, business case preparation, funding bids, and when appropriate, grant acceptance, and entry into the Council's Capital Programme).**
- 4. In consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Urban Renewal, the Director - Planning and Transport will be authorised to take the necessary actions to ensure value for money through the appropriate procurement processes relating to the list of schemes (Appendix 2 and 3); and**
- 5. In consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Urban Renewal, the Director - Planning and Transport be authorised to take any other actions necessary to accept grant**

funding and enable timely delivery of the list of schemes (Appendix 2 and 3).

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Good transport links bring significant benefits to people, businesses, the environment, and the overall economy of the Borough. For example, good transport can help people access jobs; shape greener and healthier places; attract new firms / investment; and unlock new development sites.
- 3.2 Halton has natural advantages in its geographical location and excellent transport links. The Council continues to invest in a comprehensive programme of infrastructure projects with the objective of providing safe, efficient, and effective transport systems.
- 3.3 Transport improvements contribute to the wider public policy objectives of providing access to life opportunities for all, reducing congestion, reducing road casualties, efficient freight movement, air quality improvement, decarbonisation, and improved health and well-being.
- 3.4 Halton's adopted Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP3) sets out the statutory context for investment in infrastructure to 2025/6. In association with the 22 'Primary Transport Strategies' contained in LTP3 there are a number of major schemes covering road, rail, bus, cycling and walking.
- 3.5 The LTP3 major schemes (identified in Chapter 10, page 192) are now complete. Chapter 11 (Implementation Options, page 200) sets out further schemes and many of these schemes have been delivered. Following the adoption of LTP3, the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCR CA) was created. Department for Transport funding is directed to the LCR CA and redistributed to the local councils. This means that funding that was previously dedicated to Halton now forms part of a City Region investment strategy. It is imperative that schemes are developed to an advanced stage of design and appraisal to ensure funding success.
- 3.6 The LCR CA is producing Local Transport Plan 4, expected to be adopted in 2026 and superseding Halton's LTP3. It contains new transport policies for the whole Liverpool City Region. LTP4 will cover strategic transport priorities such as Transport for the North, Northern Powerhouse Rail, and the Liverpool to Manchester rail line upgrade.
- 3.7 'Transport for City Regions' funding (TCR) has replaced the CRSTS (City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement) as the primary source of funding for transport interventions. Starting 1 April 2026, the LCR CA will receive an 'Integrated Settlement' ('IS') from government. This framework includes £417 million in revenue and £1.1 billion in capital funding over three to four years, enabling combined decision-making across transport, regeneration, and skills to boost the local economy. The IS covers revenue funding for three years and capital investment until 2029/30. The TCR Programme is part of the IS, and covers the period from 2027 to

2032. A LCR pipeline of schemes for TCR has been developed. Other LCR CA led active travel schemes such as Runcorn Busway cycleway (Runcorn East to Shopping City) and Widnes Station to St Helens will be carried forward from CRSTS. Development funding has been received for 2025/26 and is anticipated for 2026/27 to allow the design of options, in line with the LCR CA 'gateway' process.

- 3.8 Halton's current transport schemes are set out in three appendices:
- Appendix 1 completed schemes since the 2023 update
 - Appendix 2 schemes currently in delivery
 - Appendix 3 future schemes identified for Halton's future pipeline.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Council has responsibility for the maintenance of its highway network, a £2.3 billion asset (just in Halton), that comprises 606 km of roads, 838 km of footway, 141 highway bridges and 85 other structures. Maintenance requires a complex asset management approach to stay within limited maintenance budgets. Dating from the 1960's Runcorn New Town has some unique challenges arising from the maintenance of its infrastructure.

4.2 Some highlights of the work recently undertaken are set out below:

4.3 Silver Jubilee Bridge (SJB) over the River Mersey

The steelwork of the SJB requires constant maintenance to protect the lifespan of this Grade 2 listed structure. The LED architectural floodlighting and re-painting work below the road deck have been completed. The next significant work package will be structural maintenance of the supported footway along the eastern side of the SJB.

4.4 East Runcorn Connectivity

£18m A56 upgrade was completed on time and in budget. The wider East Runcorn Connectivity (ERC) project comprised five elements to support development growth and maintain network resilience.

- A56 Major Maintenance - £18m scheme completed in Dec 2025
- Active Travel links – outline design complete, currently at detailed design for three routes
- Whitehouse concept-mapping – complete
- A558 widening – based on traffic capacity modelling, this option is now superseded by proposals for Pitts Heath junction.
- E-mobility and alternative energy element – not funded so paused.

4.5 Runcorn Town Deal

The Runcorn Town Centre scheme enhances sustainable links along High Street. Acting as an enabler for the wider town centre regeneration, it delivers improved public realm, a LTN/120 guidance compliant segregated cycle path, and bus station / taxi rank improvements. Connection of cycle links into the Runcorn Station Quarter piazza to facilitate safer travel for commuters. Bus station upgrades include:

- modern facilities, installation of new lighting and enhanced waiting facilities to improve passenger comfort.
- improved visibility through adjustments to the current layout
- integrated taxi rank to streamline services.
- electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure for charging and secure motorcycle parking.

4.6 Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Charging Points

Following the delivery of on-street charge points as a pilot with Connected Kerb, the Council is now part of an LCR CA wide scheme to expand the network of on-street chargers through the “LEVI” bid. This is a government initiative providing capital and capability funding for expanding public EV charging in areas without off-street parking. The LCR CA are expected to award a contract in July 2026. Cross pavement channels (no trip hazard) are being piloted for those without a driveway to use home chargers. A grant of c.£250k is expected to partly subsidise installation costs.

4.7 Network Models

Work to update both the Mersey Gateway traffic model (Halton Traffic Model), and the local element of the LCR model, to ensure they can be used as evidence to support future scheme bids, has been completed.

4.8 Traffic Management & Road Safety

Halton has achieved substantial reductions in road casualty numbers through a programme of road safety engineering measures targeted at roads and junctions with the highest collision densities. Information supplied by Cheshire Police via their STATS20 collision data as well as the Department for Transport’s MAST road safety analysis software is vital in this task. In addition, concerns raised by residents and elected Members also help inform decisions regarding where resources should be focused. Since the pandemic, schemes that concentrate on interventions to enhance the safety of pedestrians and pedal cyclists (who still account for a third of all KSIs) have been prioritised, including measures to enhance safety at schools and routes to schools.

4.9 The Road Safety Team are delivering national and local initiatives. School engagement is excellent and interventions like pop-up bollards to keep footways clear of parked vehicles are effective. School Crossing Patrols continue to provide an effective way to enhance safety of children at our busiest school sites and are very popular with children and parents.

4.10 New mobile speed camera sites have been installed at locations, the most recent at Daresbury Expressway, and all fixed speed camera sites are live. New speed indication devices (SiDs) have been commissioned in response to requests and are in active use across the Borough.

4.11 Physical safety improvements are carried out across the Borough, for example, improvements to road markings and layouts as safety reviews based on evidence. Recent improvements include road improvement scheme at Mersey Road (West Bank); Hough Green Road (Widnes) (new

30mph limit, and refuge island near playing fields in response to local concerns), and at Picow Farm Road (Runcorn).

4.12 Road Safety Education in schools has been undertaken for pupils: 687 at key stage 1 (KS1); 1050 at KS2 - Pedestrian Training; 510 at KS3 Colleges. To encourage cycling, 'Bikeability' training sessions are delivered to children aged 5-12years. These sessions are split into: 'Balanceability' and Learn to Ride - Level 1; Level 2 (learning to ride on the road learning emergency stop, overtaking a parked car, turning left / right out of a junction); and Level 3 (riding on complex roads).

During 2024-2025 there were 2139 children trained as follows:

- 163 reception Year 1 received Balanceability.
- 249 Year 2 pupils received Learn to ride.
- 533 Year 3 & 4 received Level 1
- 1128 Year 5 & 6 pupils received Level 2
- 66 Year 6 pupils received Level 3
- An additional 88 school aged children attended 'Learn to Ride' sessions over the school holidays.

During 2025-26

- 250 Year 2 pupils received Learn to ride.
- 360 Year 3 & 4 received Level 1
- 829 Year 5 & 6 pupils received Level 2
- 30 Year 6 pupils received Level 3
- An additional 124 school aged children attended Learn to Ride sessions over the school holidays.

4.13 Road Safety education is regularly provided, examples include:

- 12 parking campaigns outside of schools, some with police support
- Leading Cheshire Road Safety Group 'Be Bright Be Seen' campaign.
- Seat belt campaign as the Cheshire RSG
- 'Power Two Wheeler' safety night engaging 120 motorcyclists.
- Training for HBC Professional drivers on drink / drug drive risks
- Road safety days with Fire Service at Morrisons, Runcorn Hill, Victoria Park, Asda Runcorn Costa Coffee Runcorn and Fire Station open days
- Child Safety week - education on In Car Safety.

For 2026/27 the following are planned

- 2 x Cheshire-wide motorbike safety campaigns
- Tyre Safety Sessions
- Summer Cycle Safety Campaign planned.
- Drink / drug drive campaign (festival season / Christmas)
- Winter Drive awareness sessions planned for November.

4.14 Active Travel

In addition to the footways beside roads, Halton has c.74km of public rights of way (including 71km of footpath and 3km of bridleways). Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) outline a 10 year delivery plan for active travel in the LCR. These were reviewed by the Environment and Regeneration Policy and Performance Board (Nov 2024). [Halton Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.pdf](#)

- 4.15 An interconnected cycle network is being created that allows active travel within and beyond Halton. For example, the cycleway over the SJB connects into the Trans-Pennine Trail (running east / west) and extends north to Prescott and St Helens. On the Runcorn side, there are links from SJB onto the Bridgewater Canal, and also along the busway through Astmoor, to connect into the bridleway at Moore and also along Keckwick Lane to join the A56 cycleway into Warrington.
- 4.16 Since 2020, the Runcorn busway has seen investment to provide a car free route for active travel that connects to key locations for leisure, shopping, education and work. Several sections of the busway scheme have been delivered. The remaining sections have been added to the TCR programme and form part of the Transport Pipeline.
- 4.17 East Runcorn Connectivity Active Travel (Phase 2). This 9km project is in detailed design and includes:
- 2.5km segregated cycleway connecting the bridge to Runcorn Shopping City via the A533 and Runcorn Spur Road, and routes in and around Runcorn town centre
 - 2.1km segregated path along Barnfield Avenue to Red Brown Lane linking Runcorn East Station to key employment sites
 - Red Brow Lane “Quietway” with planned restriction of vehicle access to create a dedicated cycling/walking corridor.
 - Further links across M56 junction 11 with signalised crossings are intended to follow as part of future pipeline of schemes to link to Preston Brook
- 4.18 Within Widnes, there is a focus is on northern connectivity to the wider network. Cycleways are being considered for Wilmere Lane, Lunts Heath Road and Birchfield Road. These provide linkages between Widnes Train Station and St Helens (along Jubits Lane/Chester Lane), creating a continuous link from Widnes to Lea Green Station.
- 4.19 Pedestrianisation of Albert Road (North) between Deacon Road/Bradley Way and Robert Street is being funded by Active Travel Fund (ATF5). Completion is expected in March 2027. Key features include:
- Levelling of the carriageway to create a level kerb-free surface
 - outdoor on-street seating for local food and drink establishments
 - improved safety from exclusion of motorised traffic
 - infrastructure upgrades to enhance public realm including new public art, feature lighting, street furniture, and signage.
 - Bus services will divert to a new bus stop on Robert Street

4.20 Rail

Runcorn (Liverpool – London) Station is to have a new station building funded by TCR. This is a second phase following the completion of the RSQ and de-linking project.

4.21 Daresbury Station. A new station at Daresbury is an ambition of the Metro Mayor and Merseyrail to extend the Merseyrail network into Cheshire and North Wales. Feasibility and detailed options appraisal are still required.

4.22 The re-opening of Ditton Station remains an ambition to support the planning growth and regeneration in the local area. At Hough Green Station an options appraisal will consider disabled access improvements.

4.23 Bus

The Combined Authority is undertaking bus franchising in phases, starting in St Helen and Wirral in 2026. Further franchising phases are expected in 2027. More details can be found online:

<https://www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/movingbusesforward/>

4.24 The £2 fare cap remains in place for the time being, it is currently funded from the BSIP (Bus Service Improvement Plan) funding received from Government. Operators are reporting an upturn in patronage as a result of this reduced fare.

4.25 76 new bus shelters have been installed across the Borough, with 12 bus stops were upgraded to Equalities Act 2010 standards, which includes installing higher ('Kassel') kerbs to provide level access to board buses.

4.26 Adult Social Care – Vulnerable Adult Transport

Since 2006, transport costs have increased from £0.50 per passenger journey to £4.18 in April 2026. However, numbers of service users has reduced. In 2006/07 520 individuals generating 156,000 annual journeys. In 2025/26 this has reduced to 140 individuals generating 42,000 annual journeys. The Council's in-house service has responded by continuing the efficient use of its passenger vehicle fleet and proactively managed the use of third-party taxi services to control increasing costs.

4.27 Home to School Transport - Policy

Changes to the Home to School Transport Policy will come into effect from September 2026. As alternatives to post age 16 transport provision, a range of initiatives are being implemented such as personal travel budgets, travel passes to eligible families, introducing centralised pick up points, promoting and incentivising Independent Travel Training, and ensuring more stringent annual reviews. These changes are necessary to keep costs within budget.

4.28 Street Lighting & Highways Electrical

There are 22,000 street lighting columns in the Borough. These have all been converted to LED lanterns to reduce electricity consumption and related carbon emissions. The team also maintains all the signalised

junctions in the borough (excluding the Mersey Gateway infrastructure) and all illuminated signage and bollards. The annual energy supply cost for highway electrical items is c.£1.2m. Replacement following road traffic collisions where lamp columns and signage are damaged can be costly.

4.29 Contract Renewal

The Council does not have a direct labour organisation. As such it relies upon the private sector to undertake site works. Design work and contract management and supervision is still undertaken in-house. The following contracts have been renewed or will need procurement in the next year:

- Highway Term Maintenance Contract – Renewed with Tarmac
- Highway Improvement Contract – renewal in procurement
- Street lighting contract – Jones Lighting
- Winter salt – YPO / Compass Minerals
- Intelligent Transport Systems
- Junction signal maintenance - Yunex
- Traffic Management – Amberon until Feb 27
- Highway electrical supply – SSE until Apr 2027

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The combined investment for Halton to 2031 will be c.£130m, if all funding bids are successful. This funding is primarily grant, and as such it is 'ring fenced' and not available for spending on other Council services.

Fund	Source*	Value (Est.) *	Delivery	Schemes
TCR - Revenue (project development)	LCR Grant	£5.15m	2026/28	Initiating TCR projects / business cases
TCR – Capital (project delivery) (+CRSTS carry forward)	LCR Grant	£108.9m	2027/31	TCR infrastructure scheme delivery (see Appendix 3)
Active Travel England Revenue	Gov Grant	£0.310	2026/28	Initiating projects / business cases
Active Travel England Capital	Gov Grant	£5.12m	2026/28	Active Travel Schemes (ATF 4 & 5)
LEVI Capital	LCR Grant	£1.4m	2026/31	EV chargers for public use at on-street locations
Environment Fund (EF)	S.106	£0.5m	2026/27	Hough Green Station – disabled access options appraisal
Town Deal Funding	Gov Grant S.106 (EF)	£2.1m	2026/27	Runcorn High Street Improvements
Highways Revenue (HBC)	Council	£4.1m	2026/27	Highways Maintenance and street lighting
Highways Capital (HBC)	Council	£0.2m	2026/27	Street lighting structural maintenance
DfT Pot Hole funding	Gov Grant	£0.5m*	2026/27	
	TOTAL	£127.78m		*Grant funding not guaranteed until grant agreements signed

5.2 The table above summarises the main funding for major transport schemes, maintenance, and interventions on the Halton network. Funding

is primarily capital grant and provided direct from central government or via the LCR CA.

- 5.3 Grants often do not cover scheme development costs. To secure grants, schemes must demonstrate their feasibility, value for money, and the refinement of options into a designed preferred option. Sufficient 'start up' budget for business case appraisals, which turn concepts into "shovel ready" schemes is necessary. Grant funding agreements often impose strict criteria, for example time limits on expenditure. Sufficient budget and staff capacity to turn concepts into schemes, and then deliver the work expediently is critical. Without such commitments, grants may be missed.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

A well-maintained highway network ensures that the public can travel quickly and easily around the Borough and beyond. The construction of active travel links enables a healthy choice and encourages modal shift, not only for commuting to work and school, but also for leisure.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

Access to opportunity is an important factor in improving life chances. Active travel provides low cost transport options to link the workforce to jobs and amenities, and this in turn supports the local economy.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

Active travel encourages children to take part in exercise. The bus and rail network allows young people freedom to travel. Traffic free streets in the town centre are safer for children and young people to use.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

Well maintained highways ensure that the public can travel quickly and easily on the highway network. Cycle routes give those on low incomes viable safe and commodious options to travel for work and education.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

Active travel in all its forms supports a greener future by reducing mechanised transport miles and their carbon footprint.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

Good transport links provide for a strong sense of 'place', allowing communities to enjoy the assets and opportunities in the Borough.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 Access to funding for large projects will remain a challenge. The cost of programme development to individual local authorities is increasing due to the competitive nature of funding opportunities and the level of subscription (i.e. the number of bids submitted from across the LCR).

Halton requires a 'pipeline' of schemes, but must finance the feasibility, appraisal, and business cases to demonstrate a compelling scheme and attract funding for delivery. The Council must finance the initiation of schemes and to progress them to a sufficient stage to secure funding. Appendix 3 identifies the future pipeline of transport schemes.

- 7.2 Scheme development requires a range of unique skills in the form of engineering design, cost assessment and quantity surveying, land acquisition knowledge, contract management, niche appraisals (Webtag), funding and bid formulation. In-house staff no longer have all the required skills and consultants are relied upon to provide bespoke input. This has implications for time and cost in programme development. Even relying upon consultants, the Council requires internal staff to act as commissioners. It is getting increasingly difficult to recruit and retain staff with the requisite skills, and the Department is carrying a large number of vacancies. This represents a major risk to scheme delivery.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 Transport networks should be ubiquitous and open for everyone. Each scheme is appraised separately to ensure it provides equality of access for all users.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Investment in public transport and active travel is fundamental to tackling climate change. A significant amount of carbon emissions and air pollution arises from transport and the use of internal combustion engines (ICE) as a travel choice. Many of these journeys are over short distances (less than 5km). The initiatives set out in this report ensure that people in Halton have a realistic choice in the way they travel, and that alternatives to the private ICE car are available.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
LTP3 (Adopted) https://www3.halton.gov.uk/Pages/councildemocracy/TransportPolicy.aspx	Municipal Building	Rebecca Taylor
LTP4 (Emerging) https://www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/transport/tp-4-consultation/	Municipal Building	Rebecca Taylor
LCWIP (Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans) cycling and walking	Municipal Building	Rebecca Taylor

Appendix 1 – Completed Schemes

Major Infrastructure
East Runcorn Connectivity and active travel upgrades at A56 and A558 complete Dec 25 (delivered in time & budget)
Silver Jubilee Bridge deck steelwork maintenance, painting, cable change and testing
Silver Jubilee Bridge - Installation and commissioning of the LED lighting system
Halton Lea busway – north viaduct - refurbishment and joint replacement (Complete March 26)
Spike Island access bridge over canal - Mersey Gateway funded replacement of old timber bridge. Connection into the Trans-Pennine Trail and access for maintenance vehicles
Runcorn East Station Improvements - Improvements to be made include signage, ticket machines, cycle storage and improved waiting areas
New road bridge over the M56 and demolition of the old bridge (A533 / M56 overbridge, Preston Brook). Undertaken with National Highways
Sustainable Travel Schemes
Dukesfield to Waterloo Bridge / RSQ Station Link. Improved walking and cycling link connecting to Waterloo Bridge and bus hub
Runcorn-Daresbury Cycle route (LCRCA LCWIP)
Busway active travel corridor – section from Halton Lea to Murdishaw. Active Travel Fund Tranche 2 (ATF2)
Busway Active Travel Corridor – section from Runcorn East Station to Whitehouse Ind Est. Active Travel Fund Tranche 3 (ATF3)
Public Rights of Way
Safety replacement of 10 timber bridges with composite material (90yr life expectancy). Boardwalk at Barkers Hollow replaced.
Public Electric Vehicle Charging
Pilot on-street charger deployment with Connected Kerb. Funded by OZEV. Covered 28 public charge points (14 units) in residential areas (Ashridge Street, Beechers, Mersey Road, Runcorn, Thomas Street Car Park, Wharford Lane).
Road Safety
Red light / speed on green camera on Widnes Gyratory to improve safety and junction capacity by preventing red light jumping leading to vehicles blocking lanes for other traffic. Capital funding provided by the Police and Crime Commissioner.
Repair of vandalised camera on Speke Road with smart pole mounted equipment
Creation of Police mobile speed camera bays (Daresbury Expressway, Boston Avenue)
Road safety education programme (see report text), Bikeability / cycle training, School Crossing Patrols
Highway Electrical
LED upgrade of street lights complete (22,000 columns)
Routine & Reactive Maintenance
365 24/7 repair and maintenance of the network
Carriage and footway - surface dressing and resurfacing (see appendix 2)
Daily network inspection (Highways Act 1980 s.58 defence)
Winter maintenance – salt spreading, salt stocks, temperature forecast network
'Pothole' / sink hole / man hole fixes
Gully emptying & drainage improvements.
Further highway maintenance statistics here:
Local Highway Maintenance v2.pdf
Highway Asset Management
Highways Asset Management Plan.pdf
Live road works info for Halton – Causeway one.network

Appendix 2 – Schemes in Progress

<p>Runcorn High Street Connectivity (Town Deal, EFW/s.106, LCRCA capacity funding - total £2.1m) In delivery, completion expected late Autumn 26. Improved Cycle and walking infrastructure Improved bus waiting areas Enhanced Public Realm from Leiria Way to Granville Street. Replacement Taxi rank at Alcock Street (all day rank - up to 8 vehicles - increased capacity) Redesigned “Brindley mound” carpark to enable future EV charger and Safe Motorcycle parking.</p>
<p>Design Work - Sustainable Travel Schemes</p> <p>Design work to seek funding for improvements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Widnes Active Travel Links design development (Section 106 funded East West links) • Continuation of Runcorn High St Active Travel (design ATF5 and development funding) implementation via ATF6/CATF and TCR • Development funding for option development Pitts Heath Lane, Murdishaw, Ditton/Halebank and forthcoming pipeline Active Travel LCWIP schemes (Hough Green to Widnes Town Centre, Ditton Rd to Fiddlers Ferry and Shopping City to Preston Brook)
<p>Busway - Norton-Castlefields/Halton Lea. Design completed using development funding further development funding to enable contract for start of TCR capital period (carry over from CRSTS1).</p>
<p>Delivery - Sustainable Travel Schemes</p>
<p>Busway - Murdishaw to Whitehouse and Norton, Active Travel Fund Tranche 3 (ATF3)</p>
<p>Pedestrianisation of North Albert Road, Widnes Town Centre Active Travel Fund Tranche 4 (ATF4) and Active Travel Fund Tranche 5 (ATF5)</p>
<p>Public Rights of Way – Composite replacements Renewal of small bridges and boardwalk structures on public rights of way network using state of the art composite materials to ensure longer life and less future intervention</p>
<p>Other</p>
<p>Updating of highway electrical inventory to reduce energy supply billing cost</p>

<p>Flood Risk Reduction Programme</p>	
<p>S19 Flood and Water Management Act 2010 investigations Flood Risk Assessments for planning applications. Local Flood Risk Management Strategy review Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment review SAB development Suds supplemental planning document.</p>	<p>Glastonbury close Parkland surface water alleviation Bowers Brook access improvements to enable screen cleaning. Eastgate Lane ditch flood alleviation. A558 Daresbury Expressway underpass raised walkway. Reservoir Act inspections and maintenance Keckwick Brook outfall responsibilities mapping</p>

<p>Section 278 Section 278 of the Highways Act 1980 allows a developer to carry out works to the public highway. This is generally where planning permission has been granted for a development that requires improvements to, or changes to, public highways. These works require agreement and monitoring by the Highways Authority.</p>	
<p>S278 held: Bloor Homes, Aspen Brook West, South Ln, Widnes Prospect Homes, Abbey Vale, South Ln, Widnes Halton Housing, High St, Runcorn Redrow, Oak Villa off South Lane, Widnes Redrow, Derby Rd, Widnes McDonalds, Clifton, Weaver View, Runcorn Town Lane, Hale St Michaels Rd – dated 25/6/25 – completed</p>	<p>S278 being processed The Ridgeway, Murdishaw Keepmoat, Hale Gate Road, Widnes Keepmoat, Sandymoor, Runcorn Johnsons Lane (s.184) Redrow, Combined Phase 2 Daresbury North Foundry Lane, Widnes Morris Homes, A56, Preston Brook, Runcorn</p>

Section 38

Section 38 of the Highways Act 1980 allows a developer to offer new roads within a development site for adoption by the Highway Authority. This requires a legal agreement and monitoring by the Highway Authority. Current sites include:

Daresbury Park Castle Green Extensions Redrow - bridge and Delph Central Halton Road Magenta, Tanhouse Lane, Widnes	Sandymoor - Bloor / Vistry /Keepmoat south North Widnes - Derby Rd/Lunts Heath Halebank/Halegate Rd Foundry Lane Chester Road Preston Brook
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Carriageway and Footway Resurfacing Schemes

In Design	
Footways	Carriageway
A56 Preston Brook by Northwich Rd roundabout Surface Treatment Footways: Green Oaks Way, Widnes Sandymoor, Runcorn Chester Rd, Ashville Ind Est, Runcorn Southern Expressway, Runcorn	Everite Road, Widnes Lockett Rd, Widnes Leigh Ave, Widnes Speke Rd, Widnes Gorsey Lane, Widnes Dans Road, Widnes
In Progress	
Footway	Carriageway
Whalley Grove, Widnes Nursery Close, Widnes Tuscon Drive, Widnes Beaconsfield Rd and Crescent, Widnes	Hanley Road, Widnes Crossway, Widnes Abbey Rd, Widnes Canterbury Rd, Widnes Dundalk Rd, Widnes Latham Ave, Runcorn Victoria Rd Runcorn Balfour St, Runcorn Northwich Rd Roundabout, Runcorn Palacefields Ave junction, Runcorn Surface Treatments (carriageways): St Aidans and Queensbury Way, Widnes Fiddlers Ferry Road, Widnes Ditchfield Road, Widnes Hale Road, Widnes Cronton Lane, Widnes Pitts Heath Lane, Widnes Hough Green Road, Widnes Boston Ave, Runcorn

Appendix 3 - Future Transport Scheme Pipeline

(*Values estimated and dependent on bid outcomes / business cases)

FUNDING	INFRASTRUCTURE SCHEMES	VALUE (Est*)
	ELECTRIC VEHICLES – PUBLIC CHARGING	
LEVI - DFT via LCERCA	To deliver a network of public EV chargers in the borough. Currently at tender process, start of delivery of network is anticipated in late 2026 and will continue for approx. 3 years with up to 300 units installed and managed/maintained by operator for 15years.	£1.4m
	OZEV funding for cost pavement channel subsidy	£0.25m
	TRANSPORT FOR CITY REGIONS (TCR)	
Transport for City Regions (TCR)	TCR - SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL	
	<u>Project Development Funding</u>	
	Design work – Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) Routes	£1.7m
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Route 2 - Hough Green to Widnes Town Centre South via Dundalk Rd. • Route 5 – Halebank Ditton Rd to Widnes Town centre and onto Fiddlers Ferry • Route 7 – Beechwood to Preston Brook/Busway • Widnes TC Connectivity in partnership with wider TC regeneration / masterplanning – (pedestrian improvements) • Widnes Bus interchange (early options/design concepts) 	£0.2m
		£0.2m
	<u>Delivery Funding</u>	
	Delivery of Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) Routes	£20.4m
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Route 2 - Hough Green to Widnes Town Centre South via Dundalk Rd. • Route 5 – Halebank Ditton Rd to Widnes Town centre and onto Fiddlers Ferry • Route 7 – Beechwood to Preston Brook/Busway • Widnes TC Connectivity in partnership with wider regeneration / masterplanning – (pedestrian improvements) • Widnes Bus interchange (early options/design concepts) 	
CRSTS carry forward	Runcorn Busway Sustainable Corridor – Final section Norton-Castlefields/Halton Lea. Cycle/ walking infrastructure completing the wider sustainable busway corridor. Cost relates to the need to widen structures.	£20m
CRSTS carry forward	<u>East Runcorn Connectivity Routes (Phase 2)</u>	
	A56 – Runcorn East, Cycle/Walk route via Red Brow Lane to Runcorn East Station	£9m

	Leiria Way /Runcorn Spur Road to Runcorn Shopping City Phase 2 of Runcorn High Street to Doctors Bridge scheme	
Transport for City Regions (TCR)	<p>TCR - GREEN GROWTH</p> <p><u>Project Development Funding</u></p> <p><u>Halebank Accessibility</u> Options to improve traffic movements in this area, to support inclusive growth through improved access to job opportunities, as well as helping to sustain existing residential and business communities. Options must compliment the Halton Curve and potential reopening of Ditton Station to improve connectivity in the 3MG / Ditton / wider 'Speke Approaches' growth corridor.</p> <p><u>East Runcorn</u> Capacity improvements at key junctions along the Bridgewater expressway (A558) and Southern Expressway (A533) to support development in East Runcorn</p> <p><u>Total Delivery Funding for above schemes</u></p>	<p>£3m</p> <p>£27m</p>
	RAIL	
Transport for City Regions (TCR)	<p>Runcorn Station Building New rail station building. Phase 2 of Runcorn Station Quarter development. To provide new ticketing, waiting, rest room and kiosk facilities.</p>	£16m
TCR /Merseytravel	<p>Daresbury Station – Merseytravel led project.</p> <p>Early Design and Feasibility being undertaken by Merseytravel. Delivery (if viable) anticipate 2030 (funded by CA TCR rail allocation)</p>	£30m+
Pride of Place LCR Capacity Fund Environmental Fund	<p>Hough Green - Access for All Scheme</p> <p><u>Project Development Funding</u> Feasibility and options/design for disabled access</p>	£0.5m
	ACTIVE TRAVEL	
LCRCA / Active Travel England 4 Active Travel England 5 Active Travel England 6	<p><u>Project Development Funding</u> Project development – scheme design / feasibility / consultation / business cases Runcorn High Street – design of addition scheme from Granville Street to Waterloo Bridge Busway Shopping City to Murdishaw – ATE recommended improvements to scheme. Runcorn High Street / Leiria Way Junction improvement (TCR funded)</p> <p><u>Delivery Funding</u> North Albert Road pedestrian improvements (pedestrianisation) (ATF 4 & 5) LCR CA LCWIP - Birchfield Road – North Widnes connectivity – part of City Region Network Runcorn High Street / Leiria Way Junction improvement (£577k ATF6 + £350k Environment Fund)</p>	<p>£310k £ 50k £ 40k £100k</p> <p>£220k £5.12m £577k</p>

S.106	North Widnes East – West Links. Improved sustainable travel routes and links connecting the new housing at South Ln & Derby Rd - Design work	£120k
	BUS	
S.106	Improvement / interventions to bus routes to improve punctuality. Enhance network with service(s) via include Manor Park, Sandymoor and Daresbury Park (East Runcorn). Introduction of bus gates prioritised routes improved bus waiting areas Realtime information	£2m
	HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE	
Highway Maintenance	Network Maintenance & Improvement Schemes / Funding The Department for Transport (DfT) and Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) are responsible for distributing funding to individual local authorities for the maintenance and improvement of the transport network. Highways Revenue Highways Capital DfT Pot Hole funding (Gov Grant)	£4.1m £0.2m £0.5m
	FUTURE SCHEMES – FUNDING REQUIRED	
Funding required	HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT	
	Widnes Loops – West Bank slip road Required CPO & building demolition (these aspects completed Q4 2025) Complete reconfiguration of the south side of the junction from the Mersey Gateway onto Waterloo Road (works on Waterloo Road side of Junction) heading towards Westbank.	<i>Est: £100k</i>
	Northwich Road, Murdishaw - junction improvement options (Note - added to TCR Green Growth ask as option for project development funding) Investigatory works including feasibility scheme design to relieve congestion at peak times at Murdishaw Avenue and improve active travel/pedestrian crossings etc	
Highways England funding required	Wilmere Lane Slips Requires Highways England funding - explore options to alleviate congestion at the M62 J7 area	<i>Est: £20m</i>
Funding required	SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL	
	Fiddlers Ferry / Jonsons Lane connection – sustainable travel link – included in TCR Sustainable Travel ask	
	Trans-Pennine Trail - Surface upgrade and route improvements to this national coast to coast cycle route	
	Cow Hey Lane, bridleway upgrade – within LCWIP	
	Cycling and walking improvements to complement Halton Curve and potential for reopening Ditton Station e.g. Ditton Bridge to Newstead Road. Improve the sustainability and connectivity of the 3MG Ditton Corridor and wider 'Speke Approaches' growth corridor - supporting more balanced growth by improving access to job opportunities as well as helping to sustain and grow residential communities. Potential to be included in TCR ask	
	Ditton Station. The re-opening of Ditton Station remains an ambition to support the planning growth and regeneration in the local area.	

REPORT TO:	Executive Board
DATE:	16 th April 2026
REPORTING OFFICER:	Executive Director Environment and Regeneration
PORTFOLIO	Environment and Urban Renewal
SUBJECT:	Policy Documents: Social Value in Planning SPD
WARD(S)	Borough Wide

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 This report seeks approval from the Board to support the adoption of the following document:

Social Value in Planning SPD

2.0 **RECOMMENDED: That**

- 1) the report be noted; and**
- 2) the Board approves the Strategy.**
- 3) the Board supports that editorial rights be retained to the Planning Policy team to remain aligned with changing national policy, and to align with changes in delivery models.**

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The Local Plan for Halton currently comprises of the adopted Delivery and Allocations Local Plan (2022) and the Joint Waste Plan (2013). The statutory Local Development Plan is the set of Local Plans (also known as Development Plan Documents (DPDs) that together form the statutory basis for determining whether or not planning permission should be granted.
- 3.2 Supplementary Planning Documents add further detail to the policies in the Local Plan. They can be used to provide further guidance for development on specific sites, or on issues such as Transport and Accessibility or House Extensions. The production of such documents must meet the legal and procedural requirements but once adopted, SPDs are capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions but are not part of the development plan.

3.3 The Social Value in Planning SPD has clear links to local plan policy, including; Policy CS(R)1: Halton's Spatial Strategy, CS(R)7: Infrastructure provision and ED2: Employment development.

3.4 A scoping report was prepared in June 2025 and was consulted on during the summer. In March 2026 the full draft was then consulted on for 4 weeks, gathering 10 responses from both statutory consultees and internal stakeholders. The responses from this can be found in the accompanying 'Consultation Statement'.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Planning applications should normally be determined in accordance with the Development Plan.
"If regard is to be had to the development plan for the purpose of any determination to be made under the Planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise." [Section 38(6): Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004]

4.2 The Local Plan is a statutory development plan of a local area, drawn up by the local planning authority in consultation with the community, under the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. The Local Plan is designed to provide broad and strategic policies. SPDs provide detailed guidance on the implementation of policies outlined in the Local Plan. This helps ensure that policy intentions are clear.

4.3 Given the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and emerging Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) the Planning Policy team are preparing to adopt the SPD to provide more guidance to internal and external stakeholders on the encouragement of Social Value contributions.

4.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides evidence that development should be supported in a sustainable way, particularly with regard to social objectives which 'reflect current and future needs and support communities health, social and cultural well-being'

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The adoption of the Social Value in Planning has no direct financial implications for the Council.

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

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

Supporting greater independence has significant relevance, due to the opportunities for young people, particularly those of school leaver and college age, helping support early careers and skills development. Improving health and wellbeing is promoted through consistent work and employment.

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

The local economy is supported by the encouragement of local employment, redistributing income into the local area. This can be built into the sustainable local economy, giving people the skills and opportunities they need for the future.

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

The SPD significantly contributes to employment, learning and skills opportunities in the borough, by maximising the role of development in providing real, useful opportunities for local people in Halton. The SPD provides the examples of how young people are supported through this process.

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

The Social Value SPD significantly applies to tackling inequality, by aiming to bridge the skills gap, promoting more skilled, higher paid employment. It helps those who are most in need by providing opportunities that may not have been available before.

6.5 **Working Towards a Greener Future**

None

6.6 **Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

The Social Value SPD focusses on local employment opportunities, and prioritises local people and local businesses, appreciating and enhancing communities, through the construction and built environment sectors.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 Supplementary Planning Documents provide up-to-date relevant information in support of the Local Plan and assists developers by providing clarity on topic area's therefore reducing the risk of a non determination.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 Building stronger communities through community engagement and good planning is a key aspect of the Local Plan and its suite of supporting documents. The Council is already committed to equality regardless of age, sex, caring responsibility, race, religion, marital status, maternity issues, gender reassignment, socio economic need, sexuality or disability and these commitments are reflected in the Local Plan as far as is relevant. If necessary, Planning Policy

documents are subject to Equality Impact Assessments during their production to ensure compliance.

9.0 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 Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended)	Municipal Building, Widnes	Rebecca Taylor
National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2025)	Municipal Building, Widnes	Rebecca Taylor
National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)	Municipal Building, Widnes	Rebecca Taylor
Halton Delivery and Allocations Local Plan (DALP 2022)	Municipal Building, Widnes	Rebecca Taylor
Waste Local Plan (2013)	Municipal Building, Widnes	Rebecca Taylor



Halton Borough Council Social Value in Planning SPD

April 2026





Social Value in Planning (SPD)
April 2026

Contact Details

Planning Policy Team
Planning and Transport Strategy
Halton Borough Council
PO Box 317
Runcorn
WA7 9BZ

Telephone: 0151 511 6458

Email: forward.planning@halton.gov.uk

Website: www.halton.gov.uk/DALP

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact the Forward Planning Team on the telephone number or email address above.

Disclaimer

The information in this report is provided in good faith and is as accurate as records permit, no guarantee is given regarding any possible errors.

Supporting Documents

- Sustainability Appraisal (SA)
- This SPD forms part of the Halton Local Development Framework. It has not been necessary to prepare a SA as there is no requirement to do so under current Regulations the SPD does not introduce any additional requirements beyond those set out in the LDF and therefore will not cause any significant environmental effects arising from its implementation.
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report
- A SEA and HRA Screening has been undertaken in accordance with the regulations, the SEA Screening Report will be consulted upon alongside this Draft SPD.

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1. Introduction and Aims & Objectives

1.1. Purpose of this document

This document has been prepared as a 'Supplementary Planning Document' (SPD) by Halton Borough Council (the Council). Its purpose is to assist with the interpretation and implementation of policies found in the Deliveries and Allocations Local Plan, to incorporate Social Value practices into Planning processes. It supplements policies including, but not limited to:

- CS(R)1: Halton's Spatial Strategy
- CS(R)7: Infrastructure Provision
- ED2: Employment Development

Once adopted, this SPD will carry full weight as a material consideration in the determination of major planning applications.

The SPD's aim is to define the role of Social Value in planning applications and outline the process in which this value can be captured and delivered. It will set out the thresholds in which Social Value Contributions will be expected and provide guidance in how these can be implemented, in order to maximise the social value gain from new development.

Maximising social value contributions is intended to deliver employment, upskilling strategies and training of local people, helping to deliver a strong, highly skilled workforce in Halton. In doing so, these strategies can also help to address a national skills shortage in the construction industry, directly supporting the rate of housebuilding in a time of unprecedented demand.

Therefore, this SPD will aim to add clarity to the broad policy requirements of the DALP, and provides specific guidance on:

- The circumstances in which Social Value Strategies will be provided
- Potential content and deliverables from developers in creating Social Value Strategies
- The development thresholds that would trigger a requirement for a Social Value Strategy to be submitted with a planning application.
- The process which contains requesting, preparing and implementing Social Value Strategies.

1.2. What is social value?

Social Value is a consideration of how a proposed development might also provide opportunity for the wider social, environmental and economic well-being of that area. Social Enterprise UK¹ define this as '*if £1 is spent on the delivery of services, can that same £1 be used to also produce a wider benefit to the community?*'.

By incorporating this into the planning process, there is a significant opportunity to capture value from development, which can be input back into the community. It goes beyond financial value and considers how local benefit can be maximised to support the Council's aspirations of inclusive growth. The

¹ [The Social Value 2032 Programme from Social Enterprise UK](#)

process of securing social value contributions through the planning process can significantly aid with the boroughs need for upskilling, and employment need specifically in the construction industry.

Successful implementation of the Social Value SPD aims to achieve:

- More opportunities in the construction industry.
- Increased number of qualification attainment
- Upskilling of the current workforce leading to higher productivity.
- Sustainable growth measured throughout the borough.

2. Policy Context

2.1. Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012

The Public services (Social Value) Act 2012² ('the Act') introduced the requirement for Local Authorities to consider economic, social and

² [Public Service \(social value\) Act 2012](#)

environmental well-being when commissioning public services. In doing so, this should be related to the area in which the public service contract is intended to be made.

The Act is usually applied to the procurement of services, however a growing agenda for Social Value means that there has been success in other Local Authorities for the procurement of goods or works, in addition to services. This can be seen as growing recognition that the act can be used to benefit the broader social value agenda in the areas that need it.

2.2. NPPF 2024

The NPPF³ provides national policies on all aspects of planning, in the aim for local needs to be addressed. Therefore, the scope of social value in this is extremely relevant, as a policy to promote employment and education.

This is particularly relevant to the NPPF's overarching aim of achieving sustainable development, referenced in paragraph 8 social objectives as 'fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being'.

Importantly it also notes that the three dimensions of sustainability, Economic, Social and Environmental are mutually dependent. Social value runs through the heart of these dimensions.

With reference to local employment needs, paragraph 80 of the NPPF (2024) states that: 'Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. The approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address challenges of the future.' A national shortage in appropriately skilled construction workforce is one of the challenges that has been addressed.

The NPPF (2024) also states that:

'Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community'.

This supports the discourse that developers should be notified at the earliest stage possible in order to develop the most effective outcome for Social Value Contribution.

2.3. Planning Practice Guidance 2019 (PPG)

Social Value contributions are to be sought via a planning obligation, or Section 106 agreement. The PPG (2019) outlines that planning obligations must only be sought when they meet all of the following tests (in line with Regulation 122 of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010)⁴

³ [National Planning Policy Framework](#)

⁴ PPG Paragraph: 002 Reference ID: 23b-002-20190901

- a. necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms
- b. directly related to the development; and
- c. fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.

2.4. Liverpool City Region – Local Skills Improvement Plan 2023 (LSIP)⁵

Construction has been selected by the LSIP as a priority sector for improving skills, identifying that the current workforce is smaller than the expected future demand. The plan identifies that there are two employer requirements: to increase the workforce of required skilled workers; and provide additional skills to the existing workforce through upskilling, both of which can be achieved through social value contributions.

2.5. Delivery and Allocations Local Plan 2014 - 2037 (DALP)

The Halton Delivery and Allocations Plan⁶ identifies a lack of employment opportunities, as a result of the major restructuring and decline of the traditional manufacturing industries that once dominated both Runcorn and Widnes, leading to the outward migration of young working age adults.

This is encompassed in policy CS(R)1 Halton’s Spatial Strategy, encouraging approximately 180 ha of land for employment purposes. Implementing social value in both construction and end use occupation to these projects will be essential in bridging this gap.

Additionally, policy CS(R)7 refers to the method of delivering locally identified priorities, including social infrastructure including community services and facilities, using planning obligations to do so.

2.6. LCR Long Term Skills Plan 2025⁷

The Liverpool City Region Long Term Skills Plan sets out a long-term vision for transforming and better integrating post -16 employment and skills needs across the Liverpool City Region.

The plan sets out four strategic objectives, driving sustainable economic growth, by:

1. Improving technical education outcomes for young people
2. Enabling access and to second chance support learning and help to get into work
3. Developing the skills that employers need
4. Providing people with the skills to progress

With a focus on long term career growth, the use of social value strategies in planning and construction can significantly contribute to these aims.

⁵ [LCR Local Skills Improvement Plan](#)

⁶ [Halton Delivery and Allocations Plan](#)

⁷ [Appendix 1 - Liverpool City Region Long Term Skills Plan.pdf](#)

2.7. Planning Obligations SPD

The Planning Obligations SPD outlines the expectations of developer contributions for each specified matter. It details the process in which they can, and can't be requested, and how they will be monitored. As social value will be requested as a planning obligation, this information is relevant for all stages of delivery.

2.8. Corporate plan 2024-2029

The Halton Borough Council Corporate Plan⁸ identifies a priority to tackle inequality, helping those who are most in need, namely by 'continuing to remove barriers to education and employment', with its underlying principles being "Our Community, Our Priorities, Our Future".

The Corporate Plan's 6 key priorities are:

- Improving Health, promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence
- Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy
- Supporting Children, Young People and Families
- Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need
- Working Towards a Greener Future
- Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

2.9. Halton Borough Council Social Value Statement

The Halton Borough Council Social Value Policy Statement⁹ provides a commitment to use contributions strategically to meet the needs of the borough.

The council wide social value policy addresses four corporate priorities: Social, Business Support, Jobs Growth, and Environmental. The Social value SPD aims to support Jobs Growth and Business Support through provision of employment and training opportunities, supporting the wider social value context.

Any further documents on social value can be found on the Council's website¹⁰.

3. Spatial context and justification for Social Value

3.1. The need for Social Value contributions through Planning

Halton can be seen as an active and productive borough, with 78% of its residents economically active between July 2024 and June 2025¹¹. This exceeds the north west regional rate of 77.3% and is almost equal to the national economic activity rate of 78.8%.

⁸ [Halton Borough Council Corporate Plan](#)

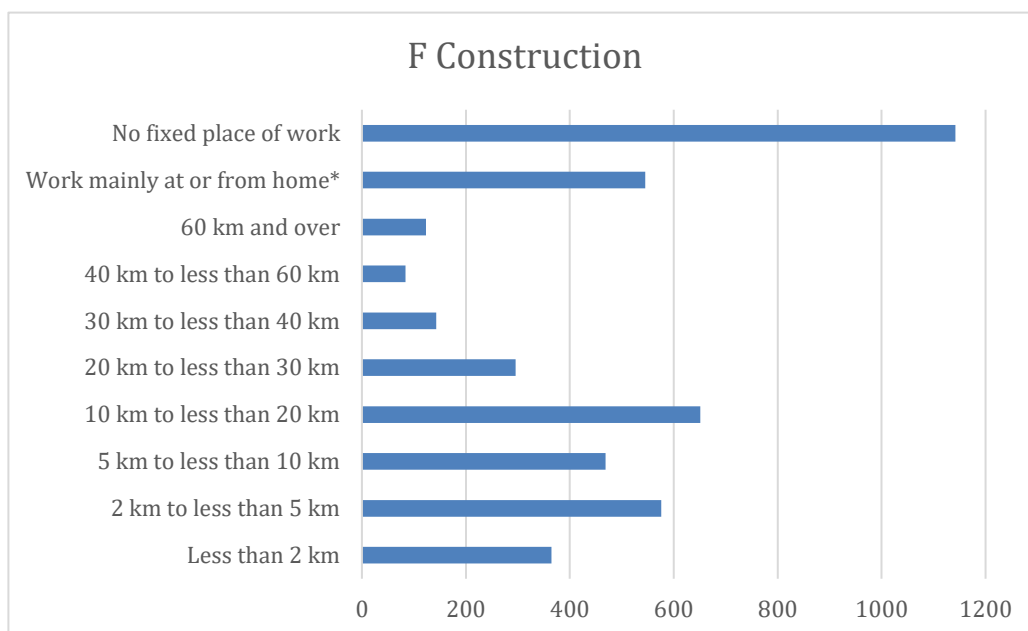
⁹ [Halton Borough Council Social Value Statement](#)

¹⁰ [Halton Borough Council social value Documents](#)

¹¹ [Labour Market Profile - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics](#)

With regard to the construction industry specifically, there is a significant shortfall of skilled individuals, with only 5.2% of the population employed in this industry, compared to the regional average of 8.1% in 2024-2025¹², showing a large gap in skills at this level. Therefore, despite the high level of economic activity, there is a clear demand for construction skilled professionals in Halton, which can be delivered through Social Value strategies.

There is consideration however, that Halton does not have any significant ongoing construction projects, compared to regional comparisons, and therefore there is a smaller demand for construction skilled workers. It is important to enhance the opportunities that are available within the borough as a result of this. Despite this, there should also be consideration that these skilled workers are unlikely to work solely within Halton, so once again it is a priority to gain the maximum value from local work that does take place.



Distance of commute in the Halton Borough for construction workers, showing a trend of travelling out of the borough.

Level of Attainment	Halton %	North-west %	England %
No qualifications	21	19.5	18.1
Level 1, 2 or 3 qualifications (GCSE – A Level)	46.9	40.9	39.9
Apprenticeship	5.5	5.9	5.3
Level 4 and above	23.9	31.2	33.9

¹² [ONS annual population survey 2024/2025](#)

Other qualifications	2.6	2.5	2.8
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Table 1: level of qualification attainment in the Borough of Halton

Source: ONS annual population survey 2024/25 (% is a proportion of resident population of area aged 16-64)

	Halton (%)	North west (%)	Great Britain (%)
RFQ4 and above	34.8	42.4	47.2
RFQ3 and above	54.3	63.6	67.6
RFQ2 and above	84.8	85.0	86.5
RFQ1 and above	87.9	87.4	88.9
Other qualifications	<i>No data</i>	4.4	4.3
No qualifications	9.6	8.2	6.8

Table 2: ONS annual population survey 2024/2025 (% is a proportion of resident population of area aged 16-64)

Evidence shows that currently, there is an identified skills gap. The percentage of Halton's population with no qualifications is higher than both regional and national percentages. Similarly, the percentage of people with higher qualifications (level 4 qualifications +) is significantly lower than that of the north west and England. There is an identified need for upskilling because of this.

Opportunities in construction can often be significant in terms of career advancement and professional development in what is fast becoming a dynamic industry. Therefore, although the skills and qualifications in this industry are less likely to be at a higher level, the economic benefits of upskilling in this sector remain crucial to delivering a robust local economy.

It is also noted that apprenticeships starts and achievements are higher than the national average. This is an evident strength in the borough and can be promoted through upskilling and other apprentice success.

Failure to address the low skills base can have impacts of slowing economic growth in the borough. Seeking planning obligations to deliver skills, training and employment opportunities is essential to ensure that future development is economically and socially sustainable.

The DALP has identified a need to increase the number of skilled workers and appropriate qualifications into the borough. Employment land allocations predicts that number of jobs are expected to rise, providing an opportunity to raise local levels of educational attainment through these planning applications and processes.

4. Implementation

4.1. Circumstances in which a Social Value strategy will be requested

In order to reduce the risk of being placed on smaller developments, social value strategies will only be requested from major developments reaching the specific thresholds.

The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015¹³ identifies a major development as:

- 10 or more dwellings
- Building / buildings where the floor space created by the development is 1,000 square metres or more

However, there is a concern of smaller 'major developments' becoming unviable due to the requirement of social value strategies. Therefore, the most appropriate threshold would be **30 or more dwellings**, representing more substantial development, in order to avoid barriers to development.

Securing social value contributions through section 106 will require an approach which is tailored and proportionate. The contribution (which will meet legal requirements in terms of compliance with legislation and guidance) is intended to be practical, proportionate and not burdensome. This is in line with the Councils generic social value policy, ensuring that smaller developers are not disadvantaged by the contribution.

4.2. Process of notification and agreement

To effectively integrate social value into planning, there is a requirement for a formal process of notification to reach an agreement, as set out in the thresholds.

1. The application is submitted to the Council.
2. Development is flagged when it is received by the planning officer if the threshold is met.
3. The application is processed and the council representative for social value is notified.
4. An agreement is made between the developer and the council. A section planning obligation and/or section 106 agreement will be used to secure provision of social value contributions.

4.3. Social Value Delivery Model

Once an application is validated and received by the planning officer, the social value council representative is notified should the development meet the thresholds.

The social value representative will then contact the applicant at the earliest point possible. This process will then confirm the commitments that the developer has agreed to deliver.

¹³ [The Town and Country Planning \(Development Management Procedure\) \(England\) Order 2015](#)

Once an outcome has been agreed, the applicant will be expected to deliver either:

- A Plan stating how the agreed social value contributions will be delivered; or
- A monetary value proportionate to the scale of development

The preferable delivery model will be for a Social Value Plan to be produced by the applicant, which will then be submitted to the Council to be approved, as in line with the regular process of planning conditions.

The applicant will then work in partnership with the social value coordinator to deliver the agreed plan.

4.4. Thresholds for Social Value requirement

New development in Halton can significantly contribute towards the provision of employment and training opportunities for residents. This is expected to be clearly demonstrated within the developer's social value strategy if the development falls within the thresholds below:

Use Class	Development	Threshold for Social Value Strategy	Scope of Social Value Strategy
C1, C2	Hotels, Residential Institution	Buildings with a floor space of over 1,000m ²	Construction Phase End use occupation
C3	Residential	30+ dwellings	Construction phase
B2, B8, E(G) i,ii,iii, Sui Generis	General Industrial; Storage or Distribution; Commercial, Business and Service; Sui Generis	Buildings with a floor space of over 1,000m ²	Construction phase End use occupation

4.5. Types of Employment, Skills and Training opportunities

There are two key areas for employment skills and training opportunities: the construction phase for all large developments; and the end use occupation for commercial development only.

Options for implementation of social value strategies may include, but are not limited to:

Construction phase	
Skills and Training	Skills workshops including co-delivery with developer

	Mentorship
	Training equipment and materials
	Purchase of personal safety equipment
	Appropriate site safety licences
	CV and interview training
	Mental health awareness and training
	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training
	Activities to support schools and colleges' careers programmes
Site specific	Construction apprenticeship places
	Guaranteed interviews
	Attendance at jobs fairs
	Site experience for construction specific schools or colleges including age appropriate work experience opportunities.
	Contribution to 'Halton People into Jobs/ Halton Employment Partnership'
	Local public realm improvement
	Local procurement and supply chains
	Site inductions
End use occupation	
Employment recruitment	
Sector specific training e.g. food hygiene or customer service for the construction of retail or hospitality services	
Sector specific apprenticeship places	
Purchase of job specific equipment e.g. PPE or safety shoes	
Relevant apprenticeships or professional construction specific courses e.g. RICS	

Supervisor, leadership and management training
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4.6. Value of contributions

Residential

Should a social value plan not be viable, the alternative expected contribution for dwellings should amount to £150 per unit (see appendix 1).

Commercial

The size of contribution should be relative to the size of the development regarding commercial development.

Large scale commercial development is defined as developments with a floorspace of over 1000 square metres.

Therefore, social value contributions for commercial development is expected to be £100 per 1000m², for development over 9,000 square metres.

5. Monitoring

5.1. Monitoring of social value strategies and opportunities

Delivery of the social value strategies will be monitored via the councils S106 monitoring process and the council's social value representative. It will be the developer's responsibility to ensure that the strategy is delivered in accordance with the S106 agreement, which is legally binding.

Any non-compliance relating to the delivery of the social value strategy will be reported to the council, and the appropriate action will be taken to ensure compliance. The council, in partnership with the social value coordinator will monitor the progress and delivery of the obligations.

The report of the delivery of social value strategies, including the number of strategies, opportunities created, and employment growth will be reported in an Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) and the Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) which tracks contributions made through section 106 agreements.

5.2. Measurement of investment

National guidance from the Social Value Taskforce has provided a national framework for social value in local authorities, named the 'National TOMs' (Themes, Outcomes and Measures). This framework can help provide a financial impact value to social value strategies.

Theme	Outcomes	Measure (including but not limited to)
Jobs: Promote Local Skills and Employment	More local people in employment	Number of local residents in FTE for one year / duration of the contract
	More opportunities for disadvantaged people	Percentage of women, BAME or people with disability (FTE) employed on the contract
	Improved Skills for local people	Number of hours of support provided to unemployed people through career mentoring and guidance via open or schools and college routes
	Improved employability of young people	Number of weeks of meaningful work placements or pre-employment courses
	Improved skills	Number of weeks of apprenticeships on the contract to completion of level 2, 3, or 4+.

Social value TOMs – adapted from National Social Value Taskforce (2021)

The measures can then be identified per unit (e.g. number of hours, or number of FTE) and multiplied by its proxy value (e.g. value of staff hours spent on training, or value of work placements) (see appendix 1)

6. Services available for social value contributions

Applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis. If co-operation with social value delivery mechanisms such as local employment, skills and training is unfamiliar, it is encouraged that the pre-application service is used to clarify the expectations from the applicant.

Support from the council is available for developers or contractors who need to provide a social value contribution or integrate social value into their working operations, such as Halton Employment Partnership and HBC Health Improvement Team.

7. Information Required for Planning Application Submissions

Major planning applications should be submitted with the standard requirements for validation. The developer is then to be notified if the development falls within the threshold for a social value strategy and will be notified at the earliest opportunity possible when the application is received by the planning officer.

8. Planning Conditions and Section 106 Agreements

8.1. Legal viability

Planning obligations are to support the mitigation of planning applications to make them acceptable. In line with Regulation 122 of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations, they must be:

- Necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms
- Directly related to the development
- Fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development

8.2. Use of Planning Obligations and Section 106

As stated, a planning obligation relating to social value will be requested for all developments over the threshold of 30 dwellings for residential development, or more than 1000m² for commercial development. This will then follow the same process of approval as for any planning obligation.

In order to integrate Social Value policies into S106 agreements, the Council has developed a robust policy background to assist with the implementation of Social Value in Section 106 agreements. Therefore, the Council has provided policy evidence (incorporated herein) that is explicitly linked to new development and will support the future local plan, making it necessary for all relevant planning applications to go through the relevant assessment process of social value contributions.

Appendix

Appendix 1: value, measurement and proxy of social value contributions Expected units and measurement of social value contributions (adapted from National Social Value Taskforce TOMs 2021¹⁴)

Measure	Unit	Proxy
No. of residents (FTE) from the listed sub-localities employed directly or through the supply chain as a result of your procurement requirements on the contract for one year or the whole duration of the contract, whichever is shorter	Number of people FTE	£31,461 100% value for individual
Percentage of local employees (FTE) on contract.	Percentage of employees	Record only
No. of employees (FTE) hired on the contract who are long term unemployed (unemployed for a year or longer)/ homeless / ex armed forces / care leavers as a result of a recruitment program.	Number of people FTE	£20,481 91% Value for individual 9% value for government
No. of hours of support into work provided to over 24 y.o. unemployed people through career mentoring, including mock interviews, CV advice, and careers guidance.	Number of hours * number of attendees	£105.50 100% value for individual

¹⁴ [Appendix B - National TOMs Framework.pdf](#)

No. of staff hours spent on local school and college visits e.g. delivering career talks, curriculum support, literacy support, safety talks (including preparation time).	Number of staff hours	£16.09 100% value for community
No. of weeks of training opportunities on the contract (BTEC, City & Guilds, NVQ, HNC, apprenticeship) that have either been completed during the year, or that will be supported by the organisation until completion in the following years - Level 2,3, or 4+	Number of weeks	£286.47 100% value for individual
Support a 'just transition' for workers by supporting those in 'traditional' high carbon industries to retrain.	Number of hours * number of attendees	£105.50 100% value for individual
No. of weeks spent on meaningful work placements or pre-employment course; 1-6 weeks student placements (unpaid).	Number of weeks	£168.72 100% value for individual
Meaningful work placements that pay Real Living wage according to eligibility - 6 weeks or more (internships)	Number of hours * number of attendees	£332.50 100% value for individual
No. of armed forces veterans employees (FTE) hired on the contract as a result of a recruitment program who are disabled and are facing specific barriers to transitioning to civilian employment (e.g. physical injury, medical discharge, psychological condition)	Number of people FTE	£16,420 90% value for individual 10% value for government

*The National TOMs social value proxies (the Proxy Values) are developed from adaptations of cost benefit analysis and appraisal techniques outlined in the Treasury Green Book and other relevant public-sector guidelines (See Bibliography). In technical terms, the Proxy Values require the valuation of "non-market goods and services" and the National TOMs approach aims to be consistent with the relevant techniques outlined in these guidelines.



Social Value in Planning SPD Consultation Statement

March 2026



1. Introduction

Halton Borough Council (HBC) adopted its Delivery and Allocations Local Plan (DALP) in 2022 and this is a 15-year plan (2022-2037). The plan sets out Halton's strategic vision for the future which encompasses all the necessary strategic policies to support the borough and its growth ambitions. Along with the DALP (2022) the council is required to produce a number of new Supplementary Planning Documents. Once adopted, these SPDs will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications in the Borough. The Social Value in Planning SPD has been scoped and are currently being drafted:

The Social Value in Planning SPD will be the first adopted iteration of its type.

2. Consultation Process

A 4-week targeted scoping and screening consultation was undertaken on the proposed draft SPDs between Monday 9th February to Friday 6th March, 2026. Following the screening process, and due to a HRA and SA/SEA having been undertaken for the Halton Delivery and Allocations Local Plan (DALP) up to 2037 (2022) that included the identified likely effects of policy at that stage, it was concluded that none of the proposed draft SPDs would have significant environmental effects beyond those considered by the Local Plan HRA and SEA; therefore, they did not trigger the need for either a HRA or SEA.

In accordance with Regulation 12 of The Town and Country (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, and the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement, the Council carried out a 4-week statutory consultation from Monday 9th February to Friday 6th March, 2026.

The Council notified all statutory consultees by email, letter and public notice (including Parish Councils, Ward Councillors, neighbouring authorities and members of the public, agents, developers and organisations contained on the Planning Policy Consultation Database) about the consultation. The list of all statutory consultees are listed below.

The consultation was available to view online at [Supplementary Planning Documents](#). The Communications Team posted articles on the Council's various social media outlets and in the local press. Comments were invited via online form, email or by post. Copies of all related documents were deposited in all libraries and Halton Direct Link's within the borough, for the public to view.

Prior to the public consultation, the Planning Policy Team liaised with various internal Council departments, including Development Control, Legal Services and Economy, Enterprise and Property.

3. Representation Summary

Overall, a total of 10 stakeholders responded to the three draft SPDs. This includes representations from the following:

- National Highways
- David Barton – Community Campaigner
- Natural England
- Coal Authority
- HBC E2E
- The Mersey Forest
- Halton Health Improvement Team
- Sport England
- Historic England
- Halton Employment, Learning and Skills Team

National Highways, Natural England, Coal Authority and Historic England did not have any specific comments to make on the consultation documents. All other representations were welcomed and considered.

A table is provided within each section, which summarise the responses that were received during the consultation period and include the Council's response to each of the comments.

4. Consultation Summary

The Social Value in Planning SPD is a new document, intending to complement the Delivery and Allocations Local Plan (DALP) 2022 and provide additional guidance for major development in providing additional 'social value' to development. Its aim is to prioritise and maximise the local benefits of projects in the borough, providing employment, skills and training to those who need it.

This supports the ethos of the Council's corporate plan, with specific focus on building a strong, sustainable local economy¹. This supports the Local Plan's policies and supplementing evidence documents which aims to provide employment and education opportunities.

Overall, a total of 10 responses have been received on the Social Value in Planning SPD

- 6 all of which were from statutory stakeholders.
- 4 from non-statutory stakeholders / other interested parties.

The following tables summarise the responses received during the consultation period and include the Council's response. The below tables identify any changes or mitigation proposed for the SPD as a result of comments received and / or for further clarity or additional legislation updates.

¹ [corporateplan.pdf](#)

5. Consultation Responses

RESPONDENT (NAME/ORGANISATION)	SUMMARY OF COMMENT	RESPONSE
National Highways	'Given the scope of the proposals, National Highways anticipates minimal impact to the SRN and therefore raises no comments to the Halton SPD (Social Value in Planning).'	<i>No response required</i>
David Barton – Community Campaigner InYourArea for Southport	Submission of 'umbrella representation' relating to the subjects of Design Codes, Designated & Non-Designated Heritage Assets, Conservation Areas, Climate Change, Historic Buildings, Traditional Vernacular Architecture	<i>Whilst the Council supports the protection and enhancement of local character, urban design, heritage and other associated cultural importance, these subjects are not relevant to the context of the Social Value SPD, and is unlikely to impact the proposed outputs of the SPD.</i>
Natural England	Whilst we welcome this opportunity to give our views, the topic of the Supplementary Planning Document does not appear to relate to our interests to any significant extent. We therefore do not wish to comment.	<i>No response required</i>
The Coal Authority	Our records do not indicate the presence of any recorded coal mining features at surface or shallow depth in the Halton Borough area. On this basis the Planning team at the Coal Authority have no specific comments to make on this SPD.	<i>No response required</i>
HBC Education to Employment Team	I can see in the Appendix 1 table that there is clear reference to activities with local schools and college, but I felt these were less clearly referenced in previous tables. I appreciate the table on page 16 comes from a national document. If there is room for amendment, I would like to see more reference to school/college work in the tables on page 14 and page 16	<i>Tables on pages 14 and 16 have been edited to add further emphasis to school and college activities.</i>
The Mersey Forest	The Mersey Forest Plan is the long-term and strategic guide to the work of The Mersey Forest team and partners, extending to 2050 and beyond. It has recently been refreshed with input from all local authority partners. Halton Borough Council are a core partner in The Mersey Forest. Under paragraph 152 of the National Planning Policy Framework: "Community Forests offer valuable opportunities for improving the environment around towns and cities, by upgrading the landscape and providing	<i>Whilst the council appreciates that the Mersey Forest is important in providing environmental and health wellbeing, the Social Value in Planning SPD needs to include measures that can meet the tests set out in regulation 122 of the</i>

	<p>for recreation and wildlife... An approved Community Forest Plan may be a material consideration in preparing development plans and in deciding planning applications. Any development proposals within... Community Forests in the Green Belt should be subject to the normal policies for controlling development in Green Belts". It is important that Local Plans and SPDs recognise and refer to The Mersey Forest Plan, to enable it to contribute to place making, new development, regeneration and restructuring. Whilst we recognise that the social value of green infrastructure, and associated jobs and skills for its creation and management, are not at the core of this SPD, we think that there is a case for its inclusion. Social value can also be delivered through incorporating trees and other green infrastructure into new developments. This includes both skills and jobs, as well as social value for local communities through for example improved health and wellbeing from living in a greener environment. The Mersey Forest has a number of tools that could be useful for measuring social value. We have recently developed a Social Value Calculator with Steer Economic Development. This is a bespoke, Excel-based tool designed to quantify the broader benefits of environmental and community-led projects. We also have a Green Infrastructure Valuation Toolkit, designed to help quantify and communicate the diverse benefits of green infrastructure. We would be happy to discuss their use with you further.</p>	<p><i>CIL regulations. As a result, it is unlikely that social value contributions which relate to the Mersey Forest are unlikely to meet these legal tests.</i></p> <p><i>The important of the Mersey forest has however been noted, and can be taken into account when considering the wider social value strategy within the council.</i></p>
<p>Halton Health Improvement Team</p>	<p>The SPD sets out thresholds, Section 106 mechanisms and monitoring arrangements draft for consultation Social V... providing a robust structure for delivery.</p> <p>To complement this, the SPD could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognise workforce health and wellbeing initiatives as eligible social value contributions where appropriate. Encourage major commercial developments to consider a workforce wellbeing approach within their Social Value Strategy. Promote early dialogue with relevant council services during pre-application discussions to ensure deliverable and reasonable commitments aligned to the scale of development. Support clear and practical reporting of agreed wellbeing activities. <p>The Health Improvement Team</p> <p>The Council already delivers a structured Halton Healthy Workplace Awards programme, providing a clear bronze,</p>	<p><i>the Halton Health Improvement Team has been noted for its importance in aiding in workplace health, delivering a structured Healthy Workplace Awards programme.</i></p> <p><i>The One Halton Health and Wellbeing strategy has also been noted for its importance, and the SPD has been checked to ensure it aligns with such policy.</i></p>

	<p>silver and gold framework tailored to organisations of different sizes Halton Healthy Workplace Awards.</p> <p>The workplace service offers employers the opportunity to complete a Workplace Health Needs Assessment, access on-site NHS Health Checks, engage leadership teams, develop workplace health champions and participate in targeted public health training. The programme also includes defined evidence requirements to demonstrate progress and impact. This established framework provides a practical, scalable and evidence-based mechanism to support the delivery and monitoring of workforce wellbeing commitments linked to Social Value Strategies.</p>	
Sport England	<p>It is noted that although the Draft document relates to social value in planning, it concentrates on the construction process and the potential for social value contributions 'intended to deliver employment, upskilling strategies and training of local people, helping to deliver a strong, highly skilled workforce in Halton.' Sport England has guidance relating to social value outcomes from sport and physical activity as significant contributors to health and wellbeing. The relevance is either around the social value that could be impacted/reduced by a development and also the social value which can then be generated from a development in terms of sport and recreation particularly through S.106/CIL outcomes and Active Design solutions.</p> <p>https://www.sportengland.org/guidance-and-support/facilities-and-planning/design-and-cost-guidance/active-design Sport England would welcome a broader approach so that a social value assessment in planning could be applied to wider cultural and community facilities in the SPD.</p> <p>https://www.sportengland.org/research-and-data/research/social-value-and-return-investment-sport-and-physical-activity Both Sport England's and the Government's models of measuring social value from sport and physical activity provide a robust and detailed understanding of how community sport and physical activity improves lives, delivers wider value to society and contributes to the nation's economy. This evidence is crucial for making the case for continued investment in sport and physical activity, ensuring these benefits reach those who need them most. Detailed guidance on the</p>	<p><i>Our current developer contributions and s106 approach already addresses open space and uses a calculator to understand the need for sports pitches etc, therefore this does not fall into the remit of the Social Value SPD.</i></p> <p><i>With regard to social value outcomes from sport and physical activity, the Council agrees that this is an important social outcome, however with reference to how this can be achieved through the measures outlined in the social value SPD, it is not likely that this will meet regulation 122 of the CIL regs.</i></p> <p><i>The comments will be assessed with regard to the wider social value strategy, and the importance of sport and physical activity has been noted in this regard.</i></p>

	<p>importance of having robust and up-to-date assessments of sports facility needs for underpinning local plan policies is set out in Sport England's 'Planning for Sport' https://www.sportengland.org/guidance-and-support/facilities-andplanning#planning-for-sport-11182</p>	
Historic England	<p>Historic England is the Government's statutory adviser on all matters relating to the historic environment in England. We are a non-departmental public body established under the National Heritage Act 1983 and sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). We champion and protect England's historic places, providing expert advice to local planning authorities, developers, owners and communities to help ensure our historic environment is properly understood, enjoyed and cared for. Thank you for consulting Historic England on the above document. At this stage we have no comments to make on its content.</p>	<i>No response required</i>

6. Conclusions following Social Value in Planning SPD consultation:

Halton appreciates and acknowledges the comments made on the draft Social Value in Planning SPD.

The majority of the responses that were received provided useful for the Council's wider social value strategy, however due to the nature of this SPD in particular, and its regard to regulation 122 of the Community Infrastructure Levy regulations 2010, the type and scope has to be considered carefully. As a result, the social value scope largely includes the provision of skills, employment and training for the local population. Whilst additional considerations around community, greenspace and heritage are welcomed, they are to be considered in other relevant policies either in the DALP or in future SPDs.

Appendix A: Table of Changes for Social Value in Planning SPD

Original Chapter and Page no.	Current Paragraph wording	New Chapter and Page no.	Change (deleted text in striketrough ; new text underlined and bold; changes to diagrams, tables etc. described in <i>italic</i> text).
14	(addition to table)	14	<u>Activities to support schools and colleges' careers programmes including age appropriate work experience opportunities.</u>
16	Percentage of women or BAME (FTE) employed on the contract	16	Percentage of women, BAME <u>or people with disability</u> (FTE) employed on the contract

Equality Impact Assessment Form

Name of Policy/procedure/ practice/change or function	Social Value in Planning SPD
EIA Carried out by:	Planning Policy
Date:	29/10/25
Head of Department:	Rebecca Taylor
Date:	11/03/2026

Who is intended to benefit from the policy / proposal? (e.g. staff, customers, visitors, students, applicants, staff, contractors)	Local people, those who are NEET, people in education and school leavers, developers.
What is the purpose of the policy, practice or change? The purpose of the policy, practice or service is what it is meant to achieve. This purpose needs to be defined in some detail as it is this 'intention' that the impact assessment will seek to measure.	To incorporate Social Value practices into Planning processes. This is to be provided through the construction and end use occupation of new development. This means that developers will have conditional approval of planning applications, ensuring that social value contributions such as apprenticeships, upskilling, employment opportunities for local people and other social benefits can be achieved, maximising the benefit of development.

<p>How is it seeking to achieve this?</p> <p>This question aims to explore how the planned systems, practices, understandings or proposals are delivering on the above intention.</p> <p>This is about process mechanics: It requires the impact assessment to ‘walk through’ the process or practices and consider what barriers emerge and what opportunities to improve opportunity arise.</p>	<p>The SPD provides the evidence, justification and guidance on delivering Social Value through the planning process.</p> <p>Only developments over certain thresholds (30 dwellings or over 1000 square meters) will be required to deliver this, ensuring that it is viable for all developer.</p> <p>It is intended to use planning conditions and section 106 agreements to secure this contribution.</p>
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Who benefits and how? and who, therefore, doesn’t and why?

Identify how the policy, function or practice currently results in different impacts for people? This is about determining who gets the service, function or policy, where possible actual research or experience should be used or pointed to. It will highlight who doesn’t get the policy or practice as intended and does this create any disadvantage or lost opportunity.

Note: Whilst it’s important to consider characteristics in isolation you should also consider how they interact with each other (intersectionality)

To aid you think of the impact on all of these groups, considering negative, positive or neutral on each and your justification for this.

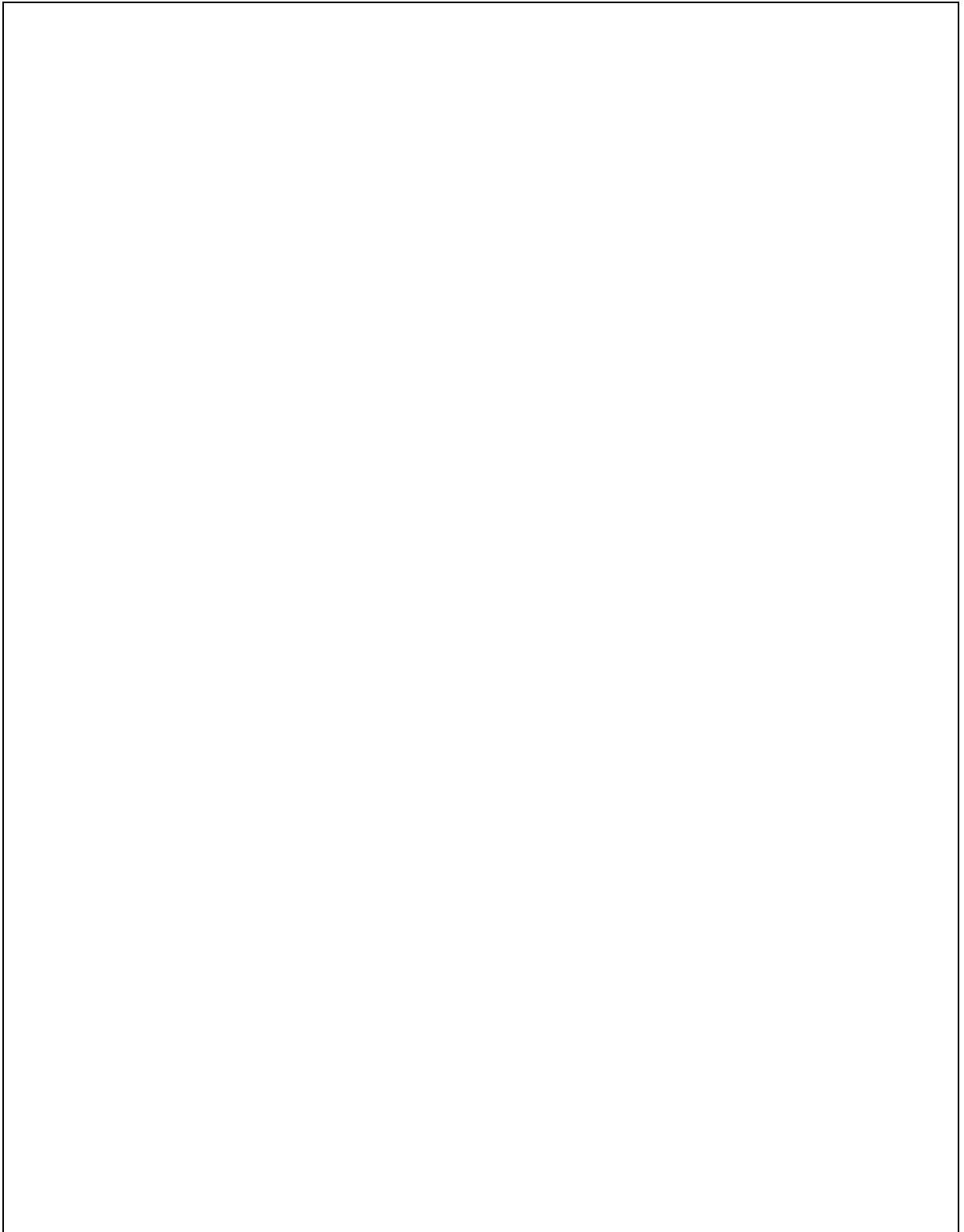
Characteristic	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Justification
Age	X			Particularly encourages school leavers and those seeking apprenticeships / early career roles.
Disability	X			Improved opportunities for those with disabilities
Gender reassignment			X	
Marriage and Civil Partnership			X	
Pregnancy and Maternity			X	
Race			X	

Religion and belief			X	
Sex			X	
Sexual Orientation			X	
Socio economic (optional)	X			Help identify opportunities for people out of employment/new to the workforce.
Other: (optional) Additional group(s) not identified above			X	

No Relevance to equality

If the policy / proposal has no relevance to equality and therefore not relevant to any of the protected characteristics or other identified groups state your reasons and end the process here.

This decision should be recorded with the relevant reasons and evidence (i.e. what data was referred to and people consulted in the decision). Note, it is important to continue to monitor and review the policy at the specified times, as the situation may change and it may become relevant in the future



Proposed actions to mitigate negative impact, maximise positive impact and promote good relationships. You should consider in any of the areas above how you mitigate against any negative impacts, or how you can move a negative to a neutral/ a neutral to a positive in order to further the organisations Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy alongside meeting the needs of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Capture your actions from your learning, evidence gathered and your analysis of feedback: consider what you have discovered, what people have told you, what does this mean and what can you do.

This should include actions to mitigate discrimination or sense of exclusion; opportunities to advance equality and foster good relations between groups you have identified above.

Characteristic	Proposed action
N/A	N/A

How have you come to the above conclusions?

For example, who has supported your findings, who have you engaged with, consulted or involved in responding to the above questions?

This might also include research, data or resources that have assisted you

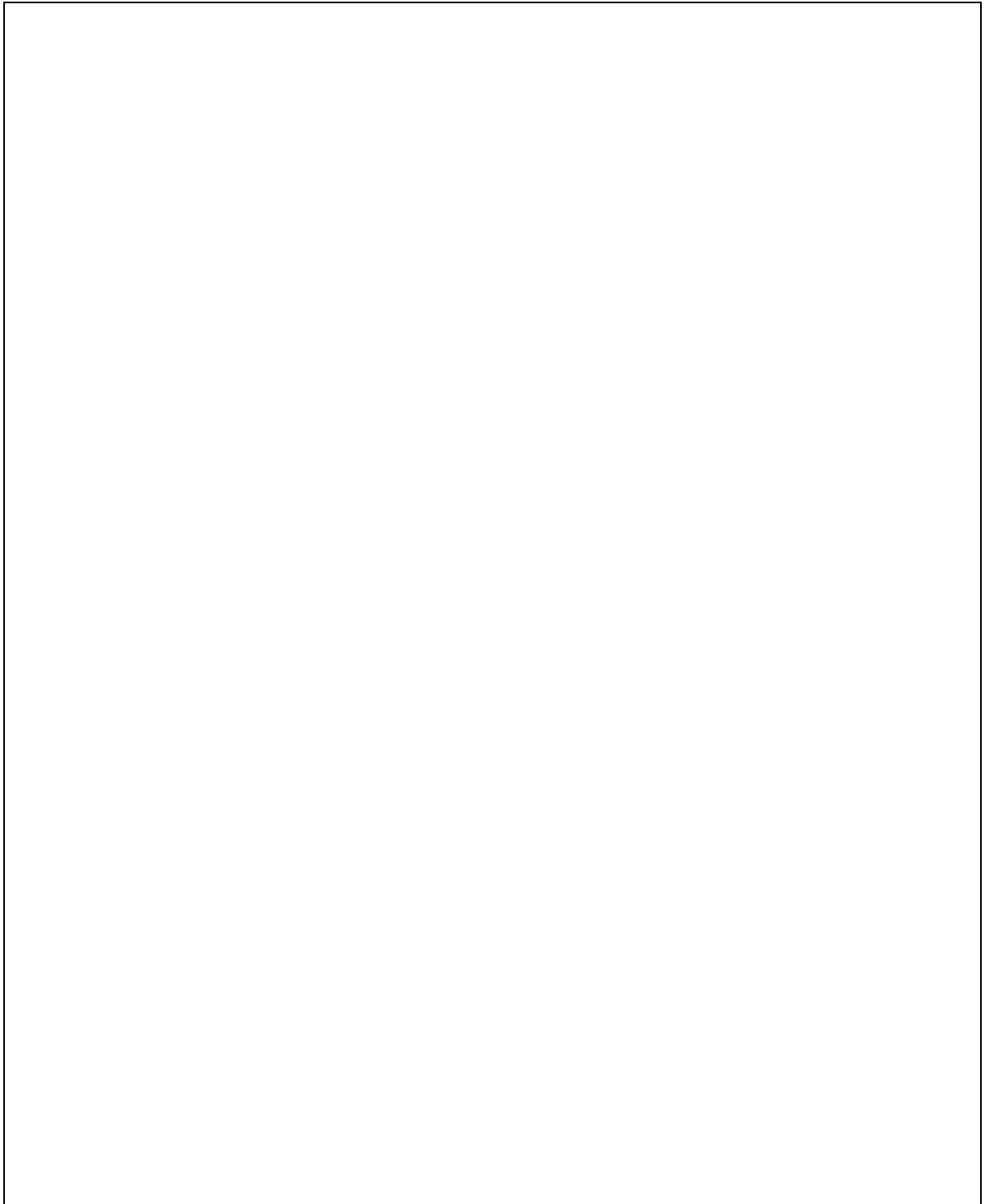
Group, organisation, resources or people	Team from different departments (Planning Policy and Development Management) had a meeting to address concerns raised in this assessment.
Planning Policy	Finley Harris, Rebecca Taylor, Jessica Parry
Development Management	Kate Horne, Will Wood

Outcome: The following decision has been taken: (please tick one box)		Tick
Approve – No major change	Your assessment demonstrates that the policy is robust, and the evidence shows no potential for discrimination or sense of exclusion and that you have taken all appropriate opportunities to advance equality and foster good relations between groups.	X
Adjust the policy	This involves taking steps to remove barriers or to better advance equality. It can mean introducing measures to mitigate the potential effect. This should be done before the policy is implemented. Where this cannot happen the action plan must outline how you are going to achieve this	
Continue with the policy	This means adopting your proposals, despite any adverse effect or missed opportunities to advance equality, provided you have satisfied yourself that it does not unlawfully discriminate. In cases where you believe discrimination is not unlawful because it is objectively justified, it is particularly important that you record what the objective justification is for continuing the policy, and how you reached this decision.	
Stop and remove the policy	If there are adverse effects that are not justified and cannot be mitigated, you will want to consider stopping the policy altogether. If a policy shows unlawful discrimination, it must be removed or changed.	

Monitoring and Evaluation

You are legally required to monitor and review the proposed changes after implementation to check they work as planned and to screen for unexpected equality impacts. Please provide below details of your review approach

The Policy will be reviewed in line with any changes to the NPPF or National Planning Guidance. Changes to the Local Plan will also be considered to stay aligned with the policy



Action Plan

Action to deliver the changes identified above in addition you might want to include:

- Any training, awareness building or changes needed to associated policies or working practices.
- Any period of monitoring
- Actions to further opportunity, unlock potential or promote good relations.
- Actions to further learning, understanding or sharing of good practice

Action	Who	By when
Monitor alongside DALP annual monitoring (production of AMR and IFS)	Planning Policy	Annually

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

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