



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

**Monday, 10 November 2025 at 6.30 p.m.
Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Alcock'.

Interim Chief Executive

BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Councillor Geoffrey Logan (Chair)	Labour
Councillor Louise Goodall (Vice-Chair)	Labour
Councillor Sandra Baker	Labour
Councillor Eddie Dourley	Labour
Councillor Mike Fry	Labour
Councillor Eddie Jones	Labour
Councillor Peter Lloyd Jones	Labour
Councillor Carol Plumpton Walsh	Labour
Councillor Margaret Ratcliffe	Liberal Democrats
Councillor Mike Ryan	Labour
Councillor Aimee Skinner	Labour

*Please contact Isabelle Moorhouse on 01515113979 or
isabelle.moorhouse@halton.gov.uk for further information.*

The next meeting of the Board is on Monday, 19 January 2026

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

Part I

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

**CHILDREN YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES POLICY AND PERFORMANCE
BOARD**

At a meeting of the Children Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board on Monday, 8 September 2025 in the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Logan (Chair), Baker, Fry, Jones, P. Lloyd Jones, C. Plumpton Walsh, Ratcliffe and Ryan.

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Goodall and Dourley.

Absence declared on Council business: None.

Officers present: K. Appleton, M. Bridge, Z. Fearon, B. Holmes, K. Butler and I. Moorhouse.

Also in attendance: S. Smith – Co-Optee and Councillor T. McInney in accordance with Standing Order Number 33.

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

Action

CYP13 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2025, were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

It was confirmed that the Windmill Children's Centre was no longer considered for closure, and this will be shown in future reports.

CYP14 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

It was confirmed that no public questions had been received.

N.B. Councillor Lloyd-Jones declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the following item of business as he was helping a resident obtain a loan.

CYP15 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES

The minutes relating to the Children, Young People

and Families Portfolio, taken from the Executive Board meetings held since the last meeting of this Board, were attached as Appendix 1 for information.

It was noted that the part 2 Executive Board report EXB10 – Funding for Extension, would go back to the next meeting on 11 September 2025, following further work.

CYP16 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (CYP) Q1 2025-26 MONITORING REPORT

The Board received the performance management report for Quarter 1 for 2025-26.

The key priorities for development or improvement in 2023/24 were agreed by Members and included in the Business Plan, for the various functional areas reporting to the Board as detailed below:

- Education, Inclusion, Provision Services
- Children and Families Services

The report detailed the progress made against objectives and milestones and performance targets and provided information relating to key developments and emerging issues that had arisen during the period.

Highlights included permanent exclusions being reduced by 18%, more engagement at family centres, EHCP (education, health and care plan) annual reviews improving to above the national average, and over £1.2million in cost avoidance for high-cost residential placements. There were three residential placements in this quarter which was down from 17 in the previous quarter. An ICT commission was underway for the SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) Team to reduce the backlog, and 189 social workers were trained in house.

Following some questions from the Board the following points were made:

- The amount of progress done in a short amount of time was very good concerns were raised over secondary schools permanently excluding pupils for first time drug offences. They felt that these exclusions should only happen if there was a risk to pupil life, for example if a Class A or B drug was being supplied.
- The Council was limited in how they could influence school drug policies, but they were holding targeted support meetings with schools

to look at frequently absent pupils and those who were electively home educated. This was to stop the 'flow' out of the school following permanent exclusions for drug related reasons. Officers had 'reflective challenges' with schools to get them to reduce permanent exclusions and work with affected families on this alongside multi-agency partners.

- The new Family Support Days, especially the 'Dad Matters Days' were praised as they were a good way for dads to support each other.
- Officers planned to use AI to create guides, take minutes in strategy discussions and for supervision notes.
- Half of the secondary schools in Halton had banned mobile phones on their premises. A lot of parents initially objected to this but there were a lot more benefits than issues raised from the bans.
- The services that SEND must provide make it very difficult for them not to overspend. Work was being done to slow the growth of the number of children coming into care and recruit more foster carers.
- Agency staff costs had reduced from £6.5 million to £3.8 million through workforce strategies, recruitment and investment in the services.
- Some funding for care services came from Central Government, but this funding was limited and reduced significantly when a child turned 18 and the Council needed to provide the same service.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CYP17 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY DESIGNATED OFFICER (LADO)

The Board considered a report on the Annual Report of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) which provided a summary and analysis of the work of the LADO service for 2024-2025. The report detailed progress made against objectives set previously and provided information relating to key developments and emerging issues that arose during the reporting period.

Members discussed the report and subsequently requested some anonymised case studies to help provide an understanding of a LADO referral.

RESOLVED: That the Annual LADO Report for 2024-25 be noted.

CYP18 QUARTERLY QUALITY ASSURANCE REPORT

The Board received an update on the quality of practice in Children's Services through audit findings. AI was being used to help record discussions and this would save practitioners time with trying to record discussions. Families had given positive feedback to social workers, and the Council's audits showed that practices had improved. Training had been undertaken with partners to improve safeguarding referrals to the Council.

Following some questions from the Board the following points were made:

- There had been a reduction in care leaver reports being unfinished. Teams had been advised that this was unacceptable as the reports were needed to monitor progress.
- The Social Worker Academy had recently finished working with Children's Services regarding their audit reports and they will soon start work with the Care Leavers Team.
- The LGA (Local Government Association) will audit the Care Leaver Service in October 2025. This will include looking at audit reports and talking to care leavers and staff about their experience.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CYP19 HALTON LOCAL AREA SEND PARTNERSHIP IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

The Board received Halton's SEND Improvement Programme which was submitted to OFSTED following the Local Area Partnership SEND Inspection. In November 2023, there was an Ofsted and CQC visit where it was shown that there were systematic failings in the Council's SEND provision.

The Board received a presentation that outlined the planned improvements with the new SEND strategic and delivery boards. Officers were keen to improve communication for families, reduce repetition for officers, and ensure that families felt there were improvements and received information quicker. The new strategy was done with families and other relevant partners in 21 engagement

sessions. The new programme should go live in January 2026 after the board reviews it in November 2025. The new programme will also include a formal escalation process if the actions already carried out did not have the desired impact. Partnership work was done to save money on specialist furniture for SEND children and work was planned to provide support for neurodivergent pupils. There will be a new speech & language assessor provider from November 2025. Officers concluded that a new SEND White Paper was expected from the Department of Education (DfE) in the Autumn of 2025.

Following some questions from the Board the following points were made:

- Regarding the White Paper, it was predicted that it would state that only children with complex needs would be allowed EHCPs.
- The White Paper was expected to give SEND money provision directly to schools and not via the Council, which meant they would not be able to support mainstream schools with SEND issues.
- Private assessments for children possibly needing EHCPs would need to be scrutinised more against what an education provider could give. If a EHCP was declined and went to a Tribunal, risks would need to be managed.
- Regarding the speech and language provider, a new company was being brought in due to issues with the current one. The ICB (Integrated Care Board) would manage one aspect of this, and the Council would manage the other.
- If an EHCP said interventions were needed for a child, then the Council would need to ensure that this was delivered. The ICB would manage the health aspects.
- If the SEND Team was to be inspected soon, inspectors should see that there had been progress made against the five action plans.
- The Council received £1.6 million to increase SEND provision for schools in-borough. This included new classrooms at Ashley High School and other schools were asked if they wanted access to the funding to help their provision.

Officers agreed to provide a copy of the PowerPoint Slides to the Board.

RESOLVED: That the Board approve Halton's Local Area SEND Partnership Improvement Programme as the mechanism to monitor and scrutinise progress going forward.

Director of Education

CYP20 CARE EXPERIENCED AS A 'PROTECTED CHARACTERISTIC'

The Board received a report supporting the motion of 'care experienced' becoming a protected characteristic for young people. The purpose of this was to try and end discrimination for care experienced young people. If accepted, the Council will be one of 32 Council's in the country considering this proposal.

The Board discussed how this would have an impact on new private care homes.

It was confirmed that the characteristic would be recognised permanently so adults with care experience could be signposted for support.

Following a vote by way of a show of hands, the Board agreed that 'Care Experienced' should be a protected characteristic.

RESOLVED: That the Board recommends that the Council recognise 'Care Experienced' as a protected characteristic.

CYP21 COUNCILWIDE SPENDING AS AT 31 MAY 2025

The Council received a report on the Council's overall revenue spending position as of 31 May 2025, the latest 2025/26 year-end outturn forecast, and details of the 2024/25 year-end outturn position for their information. All Policy and Public Performance Boards had received this report.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Meeting ended at 8:29p.m.

REPORT TO: Children, Young People & Families PPB

DATE: 10 November 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Chief Executive

SUBJECT: Public Question Time

WARD(S) Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To consider any questions submitted by the Public in accordance with Standing Order 34(9).

1.2 Details of any questions received will be circulated at the meeting.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That any questions received be dealt with.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Standing Order 34(9) states that Public Questions shall be dealt with as follows:-

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

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

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

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

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 None identified.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 None identified.

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

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

None identified.

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

None identified.

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

None identified.

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

None identified.

6.5 **Working Towards a Greener Future**

None identified.

6.6 **Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

None identified.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 None.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 None identified.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None identified.

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

10.1 None under the meaning of the Act.

REPORT TO: Children, Young People & Families PPB

DATE: 10 November 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Chief Executive

SUBJECT: Executive Board Minutes

WARD(S) Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The Minutes relating to the relevant Portfolio which have been considered by the Executive Board are attached at Appendix 1 for information.

1.2 The Minutes are submitted to inform the Policy and Performance Board of decisions taken in their area.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Minutes be noted.

3.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

3.1 None.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

5.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

None.

5.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

None.

5.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

None.

5.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

None.

5.5 **Working Towards a Greener Future**

None.

5.6 **Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

None.

6.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

6.1 None.

7.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

7.1 None.

8.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 None identified.

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

9.1 None under the meaning of the Act.

APPENDIX 1**Extract of Executive Board Minutes relevant to the Children Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board****EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2025**

EXB36	CARE EXPERIENCED AS A 'PROTECTED CHARACTERISTIC'
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The Board received a report of the Executive Director Children's Services, that outlined the need to recognise children in care and care experienced young people as a locally protected characteristic under the Equalities Act to promote lifelong care and protection for this group of young people. It was aimed to end the discrimination that young people faced when presenting to other services and partnerships, as well as to ensure that all policies ensured consideration for this group of young people under a protected characteristic to prevent discrimination.

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

EXB37	YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN (ANNUAL UPDATE)
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The Board considered a report of the Executive Director Children's Services, which presented an annual refresh of the Youth Justice Plan for the sub-regional Youth Justice Service. This was in compliance with the Youth Justice Board Guidance (Ministry of Justice) and Regulation 4 of the 'Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000'.

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

RESOLVED: That

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

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

EXB46	PART 2 ITEM: FUNDING FOR EXTENSION
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The Board considered a report of the Executive Director Children's Services, that set out a proposal for a loan agreement to build an extension on a property to accommodate 4 children in care.

RESOLVED: That

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

REPORT TO:	Children Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board
DATE:	10 November 2025
REPORTING OFFICER:	Executive Director of Children's Services
PORTFOLIO:	Children, Young People & Families
SUBJECT:	Children's Services Directorate Quarterly Monitoring Report (Q2 2025/26)
WARD(S)	Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide PPB with an update on the quality of practice in Children's Services through audit findings.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That the report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 This report provides an overview of progress against key priorities and milestones for the Children's Services Directorate during Quarter 2 of 2025/26, aligned to the Halton Children and Young People's Plan. It covers performance, service developments, and emerging challenges across Children's Social Care, Early Help, Education, and SEND.

Key Highlights

- Family Hub Engagement: Attendance increased by 2% to 12,128 visits, with individual reach up 23.5% (3,940 individuals), reflecting strong community engagement and partnership work.
- Edge of Care Service: Launched June 2025, showing early impact in reducing residential placements.
- Pre-Proceedings Outcomes: 45% of cases stepped down to Child Protection planning (up from 35% in Q1), indicating improved success in preventing care entry.
- Children in Care: Numbers rose to 384, driven by higher entrants and fewer exits. Permanency planning remains a priority.
- Placement Stability: Improved, with 10.4% of children experiencing 3+ moves in 12 months. New stability meeting process introduced.

- SEND Provision: EHCP timeliness at 57.5% (above national average); annual reviews improved to 67.2%. Plans for new High Needs Units progressing.
- Education Outcomes: Early Years settings maintain 99% good or outstanding; primary schools at 86%, secondary at 71%.
- Exclusions & Suspensions: Significant reduction in suspensions (20 in September vs. 76 last year) and permanent exclusions (3 vs. 4).
- Attendance: Slight decline across all phases; PRU attendance improved to 45.1%.
- NEET Figures: Reduced to 7.6%, continuing positive trajectory despite post-16 provision challenges.
- Workforce Development: 164 staff accessed Social Work Academy training; recruitment and retention strategies ongoing to reduce agency reliance.
- Health & Wellbeing: Breastfeeding rates improved significantly; Healthy Schools Programme expanded; HENRY parenting programme referrals exceeded targets.

Emerging Challenges

- Rising numbers of Children in Care and associated placement costs remain above budget despite cost avoidance measures.
- Recruitment of foster carers continues to lag behind demand, impacting sufficiency.
- School Attendance rates show a downward trend compared to previous year.
- SEND out-of-borough placements and costs remain a pressure point, though mitigation plans are in progress.

Next Steps

- Continue embedding Edge of Care and Family Hub models to reduce care demand.
- Progress sufficiency strategy for local residential and fostering provision.
- Deliver SEND improvement actions, including ARP development and SaLT service redesign.
- Implement attendance strategy under new DfE statutory duties.
- Advance workforce stability through permanent recruitment and training.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Progress against Halton Children and Young People's Plan and statutory duties under Children Act and SEND Code of Practice.
- 4.2 Expansion of Family Hubs integrating early help and outreach services.

- 4.3 SEND Strategy: Development of Additional Resource Provisions (ARPs) and improved EHCP timeliness.
- 4.4 Placement Sufficiency: Strategies to reduce reliance on out-of-borough placements.
- 4.5 Education Inclusion: Delivery of new statutory duties under DfE's attendance guidance and Priority Education Action Area Plan.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Residential Placements forecast reduced to £27.7m but remains above £27.5m budget.
- 5.2 Independent Fostering Agency forecast increased to £6.7m (above £5.4m budget).
- 5.3 SEND Out-of-Borough provision spending reduction anticipated via ARPs.
- 5.4 Additional funding: £1m DBV grant and £1.8m Priority Education Action Area allocation over three years.
- 5.5 Financial statement for Q2 available end of October 2025.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

n/a

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

n/a

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

Safeguarding & Permanency: 45% of pre-proceedings cases stepped down to Child Protection planning.

Children in Care increased to 384; permanency planning remains priority.

Placement stability improved: 10.4% of CIC experienced 3+ moves.

SEND: EHCP timeliness at 57.5%; annual reviews at 67.2%.

Education outcomes strong: 86% primary, 71% secondary schools rated Good/Outstanding.

Exclusions reduced: suspensions down to 20 incidents; permanent exclusions down to 3.

Attendance slightly declined; PRU attendance improved to 45.1%.

NEET figures reduced to 7.6% (from 8.8% last year).

Voice of Children: Children in Care Council membership increased to 14 active participants.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

n/a

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

n/a

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

n/a

7.0 Risk Analysis

7.1 None.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 None.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None.

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

‘None under the meaning of the Act.’

Departmental Quarterly Monitoring Report

Directorate: Children's Services

Departments: Children Social Care and Early Help, Education

Period: Quarter 1 – 1st July 2025 – 30th September 2025

1.0 Introduction

This quarterly monitoring report covers the **Children's Services Directorate's** second quarter period up to 30 September 2025.

It describes commentary and progress against 'key' milestones for the service in line with the Halton children and young people's plan.

2.0 Data Quality Statement

The author provides assurance that the information contained within this report is accurate and valid and that every effort has been made to avoid the omission of data.

Where data has been estimated, it has been sourced directly from partner or other agencies, or where there are any concerns regarding the limitations of its use, this has been clearly annotated.

3.0 Appendices

Appendix 1: Progress Against Objectives / Milestones

Appendix 2: Explanation of Symbols

Appendix 3: Progress Against Performance Indicators

Appendix 4: Financial Statement

Appendix 1: Progress Against Objectives / Milestones



Corporate Priority	Priority 1 – Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence. Priority 3 – Supporting Children, Young People and Families Priority 4 – Tackling inequality and helping those who are in most need
CYP P1	Safely reduce the number of children needing to be looked after by the Local Authority and improve safeguarding.

Milestone		Progress Q2	Supporting Commentary
P1.1	Increase in the number of families accessing support through the Family Hub on a quarterly basis (Source – Early Help)		In Q2 2025/26 Family Hub Attendances increased to 12128 - a 2% increase on the previous quarter. Q2 0225/26 individuals attending a Family Hub rose by 23.5% to 3940 individuals in the quarter. This would suggest that reach is also improving 'Fun Days' and the summer activity programme in August 2025 may account for some of the increase, but there is a steady increase in people using the Hubs month on month. Strong partnership work, outreach and community engagement would account for this continued increase and that the Hubs are now well embedded in the community
P1.2	Increase the number of successful Public Law Outline/Pre-proceedings outcomes i.e. prevent Children entering care (Source – Children in Need and Child Protection)		During Q2 2025/26, Pre-Proceedings ceased for 22 children. Of these, 55% (12 children) concluded with an outcome to issue care proceedings, whilst 45% (10 children) stepped down to continue receiving support through Child Protection planning. This represents an increase in the proportion of successful step downs compared to Q1 2025/26, where only 35% stepped down. At the end of Q2 2025/26, there were 15 children with ongoing Pre-Proceedings.
P1.3	Decrease the number of Children in Care (CIC) on a quarterly basis (Source – Children in Care)		Halton have an improved emphasis on achieving permanency for our children and young people by way of discharging care orders where appropriate, ensuring stable and lasting arrangements that support their long-term wellbeing. It's fair to say we have a journey ahead of us, and achieving permanency for our children and young people remains a key area of focus. Halton are committed to continuous improvement, ensuring that every decision supports long-term stability, belonging, and wellbeing.

			The Permanency Panel serves as a key mechanism for reviewing the care plans of our children and young people. Through this process, each child's individual permanency pathway is considered, and timescales are agreed that reflect their unique needs and circumstances. The panel ensures that planning remains focused, timely, and aligned with our commitment to securing stable, long-term outcomes. At the end of September 2025 384 children in care, which is an increase on the number at the end of March 2025. This is as a result of an increase in entrants to care and a reduction in the number exiting care. Analysis is undertaken quarterly on entrants to care to understand the rationale. Development of the Edge of Care service, launched in June 2025, has already seen some positive impact with less children entering residential provision as a result of the intensive support. 25 children were discharged from care in Q2 2025/26.
P1.4	Increase the number of partner led Multi Agency Plans (MAPS) (Source – Early Help)		We have completed a further two MAP training sessions in September 2025 aimed at external settings. 22 practitioners attended the training. Virtual School has secured funding for six Education Support Practitioners on fixed term contracts. The posts will support education settings in building their confidence around Eclipse and the MAP process. The workers will link in with the Locality Teams for support and guidance and then work with named schools across the Borough with MAP cases that are identified from Integrated Contact and Referral Team (ICART). The focus will be attendance and educational neglect. The workers will be able to support external users in ensuring any data in Eclipse is being recorded correctly, which will support our performance data. Workers will be MAP trained and this will support any MAP training offered via the partnership. A task was recently undertaken to complete a data tidy up of external MAPS to ensure the data we have on external MAPS is correct. This entailed closing down historical forms, completing forms that were showing as incomplete and adding closure forms to cases where this was required. There are currently 32 open MAPS to external settings. However, the report is not currently showing MAPS open to nurseries or pre-schools. Work is being undertaken to ensure these setting are captured in future.

			Feedback and discussions with external stakeholders indicate a positive shift in the culture surrounding the MAP process. External settings are increasingly receptive when a case is screened and a MAP is identified as necessary, and they are more willing to initiate the process.
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Corporate Priority		Priority 1 – Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence. Priority 3 – Supporting Children, Young People and Families Priority 4 – Tackling inequality and helping those who are in most need	
CYP P2		Improve the stability of care placements.	
Milestone		Progress Q2	Supporting Commentary
P2.1	Reduce the number of Children in Care (CIC) who moved between placements (Source – Children in Care)		We have implemented a new stability meeting process with external providers. The new process ensures that through the service contracts notice cannot be provided unless a stability meeting has been requested. For some of our children this process may not be appropriate for example where there is risk to or from others in the provision. stability meetings proactively consider each child's individual circumstances and support needs. By identifying risks early and coordinating timely interventions, these meetings play a vital role in reducing placement breakdowns and promoting continuity of care. Placement stability has improved with 10.4% of children in care experiencing 3+ placements in the last 12 months. Joint working between commissioning placements service and social care to improve the quality of referrals which in turn will improve matching of placements and support placement stability.
P2.2	Reduce the number of Children in Care who are/were placed in out of Borough in residential care (Source – Children in Care)		The newly established Medium Cost Placement Panel and High-Cost Placement Panel provides a structured forum to review the placements of children and young people, assessing whether current arrangements are meeting their needs and remain the right plan. It also offers a space for

			scrutiny and constructive challenge, particularly where alternative provision may be more appropriate to ensure better outcomes. At the end of September 2025, 52 children are placed out of borough in Children's Homes. Work is progressing in relation to the future provision set out in our Sufficiency Strategy which will support improvement in this measure to bring some of our children back into Halton in our own provision. One home is awaiting registration from Ofsted.
P2.3	Reduce the costs of out of borough residential placement placements (Source – Placements)		We recently held a Halton Residential and Supported Accommodation Providers Event whereby plans to work more effectively together to unlock the beds within Halton, and place more effectively within our own borough were progressed. The group will meet quarterly to progress further. A High-Cost Placement Panel is in place to review and evaluate all placements, which captures all OOB residential placements. Through this panel, placement costs are scrutinised, and plans are put in place to assess the outcomes for children, balanced with their needs, the success of the placement in meeting these and the benefits of those children being brought back into borough. A similar exercise is completed for Supported Accommodation placements, and meetings are arranged for the Placements Team and Social Worker to review. Residential Cost Avoidance - TBC as finance need time to calculate the projections of the reductions and we don't have the figures. Supported Accommodation Cost Avoidance - £815,412. Finance reports continue to demonstrate a downward trajectory in the placement costs, this has been achieved through work with contracts and placement team, more rigorous challenge to providers, edge of care and downward trajectory of children entering care. Residential placements costs forecast for end of year is £27,725,00 at end of August 2025, which is reduced from the forecast at the end of April (£28,400,096) but remains above budget of £27,517,210.

P2.4	Reduce the number of Children in Care (CIC) who are placed in independent fostering agencies (Source – Children in Care)	U	Internal fostering searches are undertaken for all children requiring a foster placement, ensuring we maximise the use of our in-house resources. Increasingly, we are exploring creative placement solutions with our existing foster carers, including the use of exemptions and temporary approvals where appropriate. This approach supports continuity of care and enables more flexible responses to the individual needs of children and young people. Greater emphasis is now placed on convening family network meetings to explore the potential of family and connected persons as the first option for care and support. This approach strengthens early planning and promotes stability by identifying safe, familiar alternatives that align with the child's best interests. The sufficiency issue of foster placements is a national issue & Halton as with other LA's have been unable to recruit to demand. It must be noted that in order to reduce the cost of residential provision and increase our cared for children's ability to live within family environments. It is therefore expected that the IFA placements will increase. 120 children are placed in foster placements with providers other than our fostering service at the end of September. We continue to work with Foster4 to increase our inhouse capacity.
P2.5	Reduce the costs of out of borough independent foster placements (Source – Children in Care)	U	There is a drive to recruit and retain more in-house foster carers to reduce reliance on external agencies, this is both internally within the Local Authority and with Foster4. Independent Fostering Agency costs forecast for end of year is £6,713,000 which has increased from the forecast in April (£5,056,476) and is above the budget of £5,469,050. It should be noted that as spend on residential decreases that spend on IFA is likely to increase (to a lesser extent) as we move children from residential to IFA placements. Resource Panel has scrutiny of externally commissioned placements and will closely monitor additional placement costs which may be agreed for individual children outside of the framework agreed rates.
P2.6	Increase the number of Halton Foster Carers and kinship carers (Source – Children in Care)	U	A representative from the Fostering Service now attends legal advice meetings to facilitate early conversations around family and connected

			carers. This proactive involvement supports the timely identification of potential carers and enables early initiation of Regulation 24 assessments where appropriate. Alongside this, we are increasing the use of family network meetings to explore safe and sustainable care options within the child's extended network, promoting stability and reducing reliance on external placements. At the end of September 2025, 52 of our children in care are placed with relatives or friends in kinship arrangements and 73 are placed with Halton foster carers. This is similar position to the end of March 2025 (54 kinship placements, 70 with Halton foster carers).
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Corporate Priority		Priority 1 – Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence. Priority 3 – Supporting Children, Young People and Families Priority 4 – Tackling inequality and helping those who are in most need	
CYP P3		Improve SEND provision	
Milestone		Progress Q2	Supporting Commentary
P3.1	Increase the % of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) completed within 20 weeks (academic year cumulative to end of quarter) (Source – SEND)		Q2 2025/26 position 57.5% (in-line with SEN2 2025 position and ahead of national position at that point). Open assessments at this stage indicate good timeliness, but this will depend upon team capacity moving forwards.
P3.2	Increase the % of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) Annual reviews that are carried out within 12 months. (Source – SEND)		Q2 2025/26 position 67.2% - Much improved position from previous quarter and looking at regional and national available data this is well ahead of benchmarking averages
P3.3	Decrease the proportion of children subject to an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) placed in independent and out of borough provisions (Source – Commissioning)		Plans to develop High Needs Units have developed significantly and Expressions of Interest Applications have been distributed to Mainstream Schools to coproduce and fund Additional Resource Provisions (ARP's) which will significantly reduce the need for independent and out of

P3.4	Decrease the spending on independent and out-of-borough (OOB) provision for Special Educational Needs and Disability Children (SEND) (Source – Commissioning)		borough provisions. The volume of which is not yet known until after the closing date of applications, however, interest and enthusiasm is high. A dedicated Quality Assurance and Education and health care plan Reviewing Officer post has been recruited to in September 2025 to focus on these placements with a view to assess and evaluate the whole cohort. Evaluation data will be presented via the Vulnerable Learners Board. Q2 2025/26 position at 7.8% - Difficult to say what direction this will go in quarter-by-quarter as it is dependent upon the needs of the children for whom plans are being created or amended
P3.5	Speech and Language Therapy (SaLT) – Increase the number of assessments done within four weeks of referral receipt (unless assessment to be undertaken within setting/school) (Source – Commissioning)		The Local Authority and the Integrated Care Board continue to work with the provider to improve across all aspects of the service, and the service has been realigned in terms of their priorities. The contract with the current provider is ending in October 2025 and we will be moving to a new model, therefore the current provider is working on a waiting list initiative to aid with the transition. The local authority has commissioned additional resources in five independent providers to support Education Health Care Plans-related work with children with speech, language and communication difficulties and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) need. These providers have been allocated 544 young people, which is 48% of children on Education and Health and Care Plan (for speech and language. They are undertaking assessments and carrying out direct work where appropriate 57% of these assessments have been completed.
P3.6	Speech and Language Therapy (SaLT) Increase the number where treatment commenced within 12 weeks of referral receipt (Source – Commissioning)		

Corporate Priority	Priority 1 – Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence. Priority 3 – Supporting Children, Young People and Families Priority 4 – Tackling inequality and helping those who are in most need
CYP P4	Increase number of children attending schools graded good or outstanding and improve attainment outcomes at all Key Stages.

Milestone		Progress Q2	Supporting Commentary
P4.1	Increase the % of Early Years settings (pre-schools, day care, out of school clubs, childminders) with overall effectiveness of Good or Outstanding (snapshot end of quarter). (Source – Early Years)		There has been no change since Q1 2025/26, Halton State-funded Nursery Schools maintain 100% good or outstanding and 99% (an increase of 1% from the same time last year) of all Early Years settings (pre-schools, day care, out of school clubs, childminders) were good, outstanding or met. Currently one childminder has a requires improvement judgement.
P4.2	Increase the % of schools and settings with overall effectiveness of Good or Outstanding: - Primary Schools - Secondary (Source – Education)		Primary: Year-end position for 2024-25 academic year in Q2 had 86% of primary schools good or outstanding in all areas, however of the 14 inspections of primary schools carried out in 2024-25, 100% were graded good or outstanding in all inspection areas, and 100% of ungraded inspections were classed as either standards being maintained or improving significantly. Secondary: Year-end position for 2024-25 academic year in Q2 had 71% of secondary schools good or outstanding in all areas, however of the two secondary schools inspected in 2024-25, one school moved to good or outstanding in all inspection areas and the other moved to good or outstanding in all but one inspection area.

Corporate Priority		Priority 1 – Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence. Priority 3 – Supporting Children, Young People and Families Priority 4 – Tackling inequality and helping those who are in most need		
CYP P5		Improve pastoral and behaviour support and reduce the need for children to be excluded.		
Milestone		Progress Q2	Supporting Commentary	
P5.1	Reduce the number of incidents of School Suspensions (academic year cumulative to end of quarter) (Source – Education Welfare)		Number of suspensions in September 2025, with September being the start of a new academic year, is 20 with a total of 64 sessions lost. Of the 20 suspensions, nine (45%) were due to persistent disruptive behaviour. This is a reduction from 76 in 2024.	
P5.2	Reduce the number of children subject to School suspensions (academic year cumulative to end of quarter) (Source – Education Welfare)		The number of children subject to school suspensions in September 2025 is 18 compared to 60 last year. This would suggest there are more multiple suspensions for individual pupils this year whereas last year there were more pupils suspended but each receiving fewer suspensions. Of the 18 pupils, 2 (11%) have an EHCP and 9 (50%) were recorded as SEN Support.	
P5.3	Reduce the number of permanent exclusions (academic year cumulative to end of quarter) (Source – Education Welfare)		The number of children with a permanent exclusion in September 2025 is three a reduction from Q2 last year when four children were permanently excluded. Of the three pupils this quarter, one is a primary aged pupil with an EHCP and two are in Year 11, with one being drug and alcohol related.	
P5.4	Increase the % of early Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) reviews for SEND Children subject to school exclusion (Source – SEND)		No children with an EHCP were permanently excluded in Q2 2025/26, compared to 2 in Q4 2024/2025. One exclusion was recorded in May 2025 but has since been deemed an illegal exclusion. The LA and parent are now working together to find a new school; their annual review is scheduled for October 2025. There were no permanent exclusions recorded for Q2.	
Corporate Priority		Priority 1 – Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence. Priority 3 – Supporting Children, Young People and Families Priority 4 – Tackling inequality and helping those who are in most need		

CYP P6		Improve attendance at school, college and in Early Years settings including sufficiency of places.		
Milestone		Progress Q2	Supporting Commentary	
P6.1	Child Care Expansion roll out - Increase the number of eligible working parents who access childcare support: - From April 2024, eligible working parents of 2-year-olds who access 15 hours childcare support. - From September 2024, eligible working parents of children from the age of nine months to 3-year-olds who access 15 hours childcare support (Source – Early Years)		Uptake data remains unchanged from Q1 2025/06. Data is based on the termly headcount. The Autumn term headcount has not yet been finalised; this is due to be completed by 10th October 2025. Therefore, the current data continues to reflect the May 2025 headcount. The expansion to 30 hours of funded childcare for eligible children of working parents came into effect in September 2025. Any changes in the uptake of places due to the expansion will be reflected in the next quarter's data. At May 2025 headcount, 507 2-Year-olds of working parents accessed funded hours. This compares to a figure of 503 at the same point last year (May 2024 headcount). At May 2025 headcount, 551 under 2-year-olds of working parents accessed funding hours, compared to 513 at the same point last year (May 2024 headcount)	
P6.2	Increase number of eligible children for the vulnerable 2- year-old funding accessing Early Years (EY) provision (internally collected termly information – may not match to published data from census) (Source – Early Years)		Uptake data remains unchanged from Q1 2025/26. Data is based on the termly headcount. The Autumn term headcount has not yet been finalised; this is due to be completed by 10/10/2025. Therefore, the current data continues to reflect the May 2025 headcount. From April 2025, the process for accessing funding for disadvantaged two-year-olds was strengthened to reach more families who have not yet engaged with the offer. Any parents identified on the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) list who had not yet generated their funding code can now be contacted by the Family Hub team to offer support. Between April and August 2025, 112 families were contacted through this approach.	

			At May headcount 2025, 303 children eligible for the disadvantaged 2-Year-old funding accessed their funded hours. 381 families were identified in April 2025 on the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) list as eligible for funding. The percentage of eligible 2-year-olds accessing a place is % compared to 77% Q4 2024/25.
P6.3	Increase the % taking up of Early Years Entitlement for 3- to 4-year-olds. (Source – Early Years)		Uptake data remains unchanged from Q1 2025/26 as it is based on the termly headcount. The Autumn term 2025 headcount has not yet been finalised; this is due to be completed by 10/10/2025. There the current data continues to reflect the May 2025 headcount. At May headcount 1913 children accessed 3 & 4-year-old Funded Early Years Entitlement. 89% take up out of 2170 are accessing 3 & 4-Year-old Funded Early Years Entitlement in Halton.
P6.4	Increased attendance at schools: a) Primary b) Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) c) Secondary d) Special (Source –Education Welfare)		The attendance at the end of the last academic year (July 2025) was: a) Primary attendance has dropped from Q1 at 94.8% to 94.5% in Q2 b) PRU attendance has risen from 43% in Q2 to 45.1% in Q2 c) Secondary attendance has dropped from 90% in Q1 to 89.3% in Q2 d) Special school attendance has slightly decreased from 87.9% in Q1 to 87.5% in Q2 This is a reduction in attendance in September 2025 compared to Q2 September 2024 which was: - a) 95.58% in 2024 compared to 94.5% in September 2025 c) 92.52% in 2024 compared to 89.3% in September 2025 d) 91.50% in 2024 compared to 87.5% in September 2025
P6.5	Reduce the number of children who are Electively Home Educated (EHE) including those open to Children in Need or Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan (CPP) a) Children in need (CIN) b) Children subject to a child protection plan (CP) c) Children with special educational needs or disability (SEND)		The current number of EHE pupils is 257, which is higher than the figure in Q2 2024/25 last year of 207. It is lower than the figure at the end of July 2025, however 20% of those pupils were Year 11. a) 7 b) 3

	(Source – Education)		c) 12 have an EHCP, one is undergoing statutory assessment and 85 are recorded as SEN Support
P6.6	Reduce the number of children who are missing education. a) Children in need (CIN) b) Children subject to a child protection plan (CP) c) Children with special educational needs or disability (SEND) (Source – Education)		The number of children on the tracking list as of end 2025 is 22, a decrease from the previous quarter of 54. There are however three confirmed CME cases, two of which are SEN Support. Of the 22 CME tracking pupils there are: a) 2 CIN b) 2 CPP c) 4 SEN Support pupils
P6.7	Reduce the number of children Not in Receipt of Full-time education (NIROFTI) a) Children in need (CIN) b) Children subject to a child protection plan (CP) c) Children with special educational needs or disability (SEND) (Source – Education)		There are currently 48 pupils on a part-time timetable, with 14 in year 11. In comparison to 61 pupils in the Q1 2025/26 report. a) 2 b) 2 c) 11 have an EHCP, four are undergoing statutory assessment and 19 are recorded as SEN Support
P6.8	Reduce the number of children accessing alternative provision (Bridge School) or educated other than at school. a) Children in need (CIN) b) Children subject to a child protection plan (CP) c) Children with special educational needs or disability (SEND) (Source – Education)		The current number of pupils attending The Bridge School is 81, which is lower than the figure of 93 pupils at the end of July 2025, due to the majority of pupils being in year 11. a) 13 b) 2 c) 7 have an EHCP, one is undergoing statutory assessment and 65 are recorded as SEN Support The current number of pupils recorded as Education other than at school (EOTAS) is 24. This is lower than the 29 at the end of July 25 and the 38 at the end of Q1 2025/26. a) 2 b) 0 c) 21 have an EHCP, three are undergoing statutory assessment and one is recorded as SEN Support

Corporate Priority	Priority 1 – Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence. Priority 3 – Supporting Children, Young People and Families Priority 4 – Tackling inequality and helping those who are in most need
CYP P07	Improve professional practice including the quality of children and families' social work.

Milestone		Progress Q2	Supporting commentary																									
P7.1	Increase the number of audits grades as good in the sub section ‘Identifying & Responding to Need, Abuse & Thresholds’ (Source – Audit)		During Q2 2025/26 12.5% Early help were graded Outstanding 25% were graded Good 7% of help and protect were graded ‘Good’																									
P7.2	Increase the number of audits grades as good in the sub section ‘Providing Effective Help’ (Source – Audit)		During Q2 2025/26 37.5% Early Help were graded Good or above (Down) 14% of help and protect were graded ‘Good’ (Down) 29% Children in Care were graded ‘Good’ (static) 30% Care Leavers were graded ‘Good’ (down)																									
P7.3	Increase the number of children who benefit from management oversight and supervision graded ‘good’ through the audit sub section ‘Making Good Decisions & Management Oversight.’ (Source – Audit)		During Q2 2025/26 12.5% Early help were graded Outstanding 25% were graded Good 7% of help and protect were graded ‘Good’																									
P7.4	Increase the number of children’s casefiles receiving an overall grade of ‘Good’ through the audit process (Source – Lynette Lofthouse)		<table><tr><th>Grade</th><th colspan="4">Early Help</th></tr><tr><th></th><th>Q4</th><th>Q1</th><th>Q2</th><th>Trajectory</th></tr><tr><td>Good</td><td>80%</td><td>71%</td><td>37.5%</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>RI</td><td>20%</td><td>29%</td><td>62.5%</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>IA</td><td>0%</td><td>0%</td><td>0%</td><td></td></tr></table>	Grade	Early Help					Q4	Q1	Q2	Trajectory	Good	80%	71%	37.5%		RI	20%	29%	62.5%		IA	0%	0%	0%	
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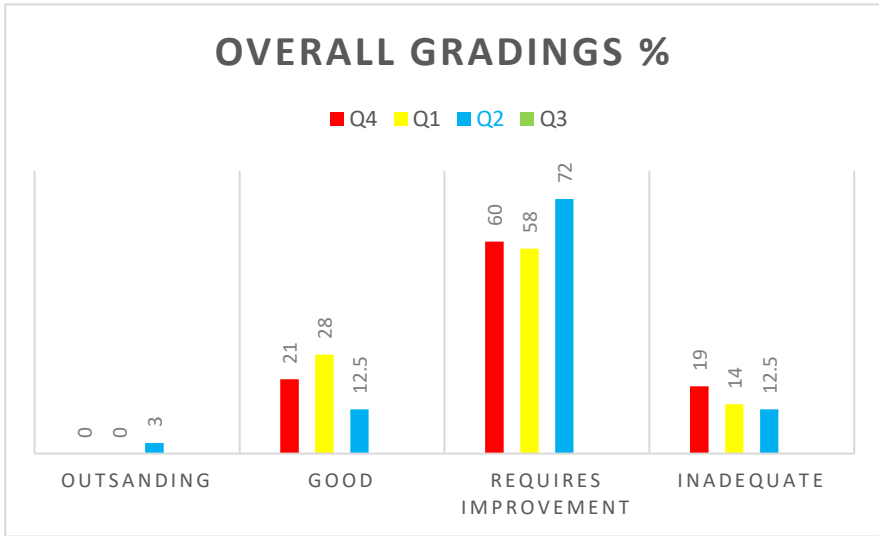
Grade	Help & protect			
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Trajectory
Good	14%	15%	3.5%	
RI	48%	70%	86%	
IA	38%	15%	10%	

Grade	Children in Care			
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Trajectory
Good	0%	14%	23.5%	
RI	93%	64%	59%	
IA	7%	21%	18%	

Grade	Care Leavers			
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Trajectory
Good	43%	27%	20%	
RI	57%	63%	60%	
IA	0%	9%	20%	

Q1 2025/26 practice has shown an upturn when compared with previous Q4 2025/26, Good has improved by 7% to 28%. RI has decreased by 2% and IA has decreased by 5%. (Q2 comments not yet available)

- 3% of Children's audits were graded Outstanding. 
- 12.5% of audits were graded as Good 
- 72% were graded as Requires Improvement 
- 12.5% were graded as Inadequate 

			OVERALL GRADINGS % <table><thead><tr><th>Grading</th><th>Q4</th><th>Q1</th><th>Q2</th><th>Q3</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>OUTSTANDING</td><td>0</td><td>0</td><td>3</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>GOOD</td><td>21</td><td>28</td><td>12.5</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>REQUIRES IMPROVEMENT</td><td>60</td><td>58</td><td>72</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>INADEQUATE</td><td>19</td><td>14</td><td>12.5</td><td></td></tr></tbody></table>	Grading	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	OUTSTANDING	0	0	3		GOOD	21	28	12.5		REQUIRES IMPROVEMENT	60	58	72		INADEQUATE	19	14	12.5	
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P7.5	Increase the number of social workers accessing training through the Social Work Academy (Source – Social Work Academy)		The Social Work academy have continued to offer training to support the improvement plan and practice improvement throughout children’s social care. This continues to be well received. Managers and practitioners have been provided training in the following areas: - Trauma informed practice - Assessments, Plans and visits - Motivational interviewing - MALD specialist assessment training - Report writing training - ASYE training - Supervision and management oversight 1:1 reflective discussions In Q2 2025/26 a total of 164 staff accessed the above training. This is a slight reduction to Q1 (189) however, expected due to the holiday period. Regular training is available to staff through the Social Work																									

			Academy training offer in line with the Children's improvement plan as well as: 1:1 support and ASYE programme which continues to be promoted each week.
P7.6	Increasing the number of permanent staff (Source – Children's Social Care)	Refer Comment	The sufficiency strategy to reduce agency numbers and increase permanent staff continues to be on track. The Local authority is utilising the Approach program to train and recruit social workers. This program sees multiple students (nine in the most recent cohort) to increase the permanent staff numbers. The approach program allows us to support the training of social workers and provide permanent posts to those successfully completing their ASYE. The cohort is split into two groups one in Duty and Assessment and one in Children in need/Child Protection service. Whilst the students may not stay within those teams staffing as needed. codes are allocated to each of the students in anticipation of the successful completion of the course. This will see agency numbers drop again in 12 months. Whilst this is the projected plan, the local authority continues to discuss with agency staff the benefits of permanent working to encourage transfer to permanent posts, and the recruitment campaign continues.
P7.7	Reduce the number of agency workers and associated costs. (Source – Children's Social Care)	Refer Comment	The agency rates continue to fall for permanent posts and is down to 28.6. The new government rules whilst having a longer-term positive impact does cause some complexities in the short term. Emergency cover arrangements for situations such as sickness means that posts can be left uncovered for a period of a month due to new agency rules around notice periods. The new rules due to be introduced around three years post qualifying in a permanent role will be a positive and we are seeing a number of agency workers who do not meet this criteria converting to permanent posts, which should be reflected in the next quarter's data.

Corporate Priority	Priority 1 – Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence. Priority 3 – Supporting Children, Young People and Families Priority 4 – Tackling inequality and helping those who are in most need
CYP P8	Reducing Child obesity

Milestone		Progress Q2	Supporting commentary
P8.1	Increase % breast feeding and initiation and maintenance at 6 – 8 weeks (Source – Health Engagement)		Target is an annual increase of 0.5% at 6-8 weeks. Most recent data (Q1 2025/26) shows a further significant increase on 2024-25 rates: Breastfeeding initiation: 2024/25 = 55.1%. Q1 2025/26 = 60.9% Breastfeeding at 10-14 days: 2024/25 = 48.1%. Q1 2025/26 = 55.3% Breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks: 2024/25 = 35.4%. Q1 2025/26 = 41.2% Lots of ongoing work to improve the culture of breastfeeding in the borough and protect the future of breastfeeding for next generations. In addition to universal infant feeding support service offered to all families in the antenatal and postnatal periods.
P8.2	Maintain/increase the number of schools engaging in the Healthy Schools Programme which includes whole School approaches to tackling obesity. (Source – Health Engagement)		New school year commenced, with 13 Healthy Schools sign up visits already completed in September 2025. New this year – schools can opt to work towards Bronze Healthy Schools award for engaging with their annual visit. Silver awards when they evidence whole-school approaches to health and wellbeing, and Gold for completed an evidence-based self-assessment framework specifically focussing on whole-school approaches to healthy weight.
P8.3	Increase the number of parents of children age under 5 accessing the 'HENRY' Programme (Source – Health Engagement)		New key performance indicators agreed with 0-19 service to refer ten families per quarter. 18 referred via all routes, including self-referral this Q2 2025/26. Current course ongoing. Training for staff to deliver additional HENRY 5-12 programme started this quarter, with the new course launching in January 2026.

Corporate Priority	Priority 1 – Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence. Priority 3 – Supporting Children, Young People and Families Priority 4 – Tackling inequality and helping those who are in most need
CYP P9	Improve access to positive opportunities.

Milestone		Progress Q2	Supporting Commentary
P9.1	Increase the number of care leavers accessing the Care leavers group (Source – Care Leavers)		Halton now have a hub in Liverpool supporting the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children cohort and young people out of area which has increased numbers. We have also included more services attending the hub which are providing a more variety of support which is attracting more young people.
P9.2	Increase the engagement for Children in Need, Children in Care and Care Leavers via Barnardo's contract Source – Commissioning)		With support from the local authority, via the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Board, Barnardo's currently have no waiting list, and referrals are flowing effectively. Halton recently held a Residential and Supported Accommodation Providers Event whereby Barnardo's and another provider presented the service to highlight the availability and referral routes.

Corporate Priority		Priority 1 – Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence. Priority 3 – Supporting Children, Young People and Families Priority 4 – Tackling inequality and helping those who are in most need		
CYP P10		Improve Mental Health provision.		
Milestone		Progress Q2	Supporting Commentary	
P10.1	Increase the numbers of Primary and Secondary school educators being trained as ‘Thrive’ Licensed Practitioners. (Source – Family Thrive)		Roll out of this training is now complete. 81% of schools took up the offer. Additional unallocated places have now been distributed to schools who wanted more practitioners. We have also been able to train a number of ‘Family Thrive’ practitioners with the surplus left.	
P10.2	Increase the number of strengths and difficulties questionnaires (SDQ) completed for Children in Care (Source – Children in Care / Health)	Refer comment	This annual indicator is for children in care 12 months at year end 31 st March 2026. SDQ score required for age 4-17 at point of health assessment 2024/25 showed a reduction on previous year (2023/24). Reasons for no SDQ score is mostly out of borough not returning SDQ form or not completed and returned by carers or refused. <i>Performance Team.</i>	
P10.3	Increase the number of health assessment (initial and review) for Children in Care (Source – Children in Care / Health)	Refer comment	This annual indicator is for children in care 12 months at year end 31 st March 2026. 2024/25 showed a reduction on previous year 2023/24. <i>Performance Team.</i>	
P10.4	Reduce the number of children who are accessing education under Section 19 (Source – Education Welfare)		There were two primary children who have EHCPs permanently excluded in Q2, compared to one Q1. However, one was recently overturned at an Independent Review Panel, so only one stands as a permanent exclusion in this quarter.	
P10.5	Reduce the % waiting time for Children in Care (CIC) to access Mental Health provision (Source – Children in Care)	Refer comment	There is an identified escalation process in place for children in Care accessing CAMHS is required. Emotional wellbeing panel takes place monthly, and Halton CAMHS attend to review any referrals.	

Corporate Priority	Priority 1 – Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence. Priority 3 – Supporting Children, Young People and Families Priority 4 – Tackling inequality and helping those who are in most need
CYP P11	Strengthen the voice of children and young people.

Milestone		Progress Q1	Supporting Commentary
P11.1	Increase the number of ‘good’ gradings within Children Social Care casefile audits for the child’s voice and how it informs their plans (Source – Audit)		During Q2 2025/26 • 37.5% in Early Help were graded ‘good’ or above (Down) • 3% Help & Protect were graded ‘good’ (Down) • 24% Children in Care were graded ‘good’ (Down)
P11.2	Increase the number of children and young people involved with the Children in Care Council (CICC) (Source – Children in Care)		We have a further five children accessing the CICC and activities. One is by use of text message and community group. Four are attending the sessions and meetings on a regular basis bringing the total now to 14 this is not counting the co-chair Care leaver. All attend informal meetings and feedback and into formal meetings via community what’s app group, if they don’t wish to attend the formal setting and meeting.

Corporate Priority	Priority 1 – Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence. Priority 3 – Supporting Children, Young People and Families Priority 4 – Tackling inequality and helping those who are in most need
CYP P12	Improve pathways into meaningful employment with training and both Further and Higher Education

Milestone		Progress Q2	Supporting Commentary
P12.1	Reduce the percentage of 16–17-year-olds not in education, employment or training or whose activities are not known to the council (Source – Education and Employment)		Average not in education, employment and training (NEET) and Not Known figure is 7.6%. This compared favourably to the same period in 2024 where the figure was 8.8% and continues the reduction in NEET and Not Known figures seen in Q1 2025/26 Despite this positive progress maintaining a reduction in NEET figures is threatened by the lack of post 16 provision in Halton and the withdrawal of a provider in July 2025. An application for additional post 16 provision to fill the gap has been made to the Department for Education, who have accepted there is a case for additional provision. The Department for Education is seeking further consultation with post 16 providers who would consider expanding delivery in Halton. This will take place during October 2025.
P12.2	Increase the number of good quality pathway plans as identified through the audit process for Care Leavers (Source – Audit)		Q2 2025/26 the sub-grade ‘support into adulthood’ which asks the auditor to consider and summarise the work that has taken place, how stability and permanence has been achieved leading to good outcomes for the child/YP and what this means for the child/YP currently sits at 20% graded as ‘Good’.

Appendix 3: Progress Against Performance Indicators

	STRATEGIC ISSUES	BASELINE POSITION	OUTCOMES AT END OF YEAR 1	OUTCOMES AT END OF YEAR 3	INTERVENTIONS	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
A	Develop and embed Family Hubs and extend their provision to include 19 to 25 age range with additional needs					
B	Wraparound Care Programme - Submitted a supply and demand analysis to the DFE, recruit a Wraparound care coordinator to lead on expanding the project.					
C	Pause Project - secure further funding from partners for 3-5 years submit funding bud					
D	Utilise the grant of £1m from Delivering Better Value (DBV) programme.					
E	Implement redevised structure for children in need service.					
F	SEND - Commission a specialist equipment provider to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND in Halton schools/settings.					
G	SEND - 'Tell it once' framework co-produced and launched.					
H	SEND - Complete a multi-agency joined up review of current ICT systems and processes understanding current ICT platforms used for information storing and sharing and how they interlink.					
I	Halton Alternative Provision Strategy and Alternative Provision offer co-produced with all system partners.					
J	Review the Neglect Strategy.					
K	Develop a Section 19 Policy and establish an Education Inclusion Panel to determine when					

	the LA Section 19 duty applies and education offer.					
L	Halton Priority education Action Area Plan, £1.8M allocated across 3 years to tackle attendance and attainment.	What has gone on in the quarter towards achieving that, what the update, i.e., meeting and outcome or decision making				
M	Deliver new statutory duties under the DfE 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance.'					
N	Submit a bid to the DfE for new post 16 provision in Halton					
O	Support the Right to succeed agenda - Halton Lea Cradle to Career 2024-26 for the design, delivery and reporting of a youth offer.					
P	Establish 'The Food Active Healthy and Active Futures Pledge', a whole school approach to tackling obesity.					
Q	National Child Measurement Programme (data provided annually)					

Appendix 4: Financial Statements

Attached as separate documents

Progress Symbols are used in the following manner

Progress		Milestone
Green		Indicates that the milestone is on course to be achieved within the appropriate timeframe.
Amber		Indicates that it is uncertain, or too early to say at this stage whether the milestone will be achieved within the appropriate timeframe.
Red		Indicates that it is unlikely or certain that the objective will not be achieved within the appropriate timeframe.

CHILDREN & FAMILIES DEPARTMENT**Revenue Budget as at 30 September 2025**

	Annual Budget £'000	Budget to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure					
Employees	20,757	9,506	9,786	(280)	(726)
Other Premises	395	181	183	(2)	(4)
Supplies & Services	1,714	828	1,120	(292)	(584)
Transport	367	163	108	55	103
Direct Payments	1,220	590	541	49	86
Commissioned services to Vol Orgs	224	81	81	0	0
Residential Care	27,526	11,138	11,665	(527)	(58)
Out of Borough Adoption	97	49	5	44	92
Out of Borough Fostering	5,469	1,648	2,384	(736)	(1,263)
In House Adoption	557	164	142	22	24
Special Guardianship Order	2,604	1,137	1,073	64	129
In House Foster Carer Placements	2,766	1,169	932	237	476
Lavender House Contract Costs	279	117	115	2	4
Home Support & Respite	494	287	228	59	122
Care Leavers	434	181	178	3	7
Family Support	81	27	13	14	28
Contracted services	3	2	2	(0)	(1)
Emergency Duty	184	33	33	0	0
Youth Offending Services	461	-8	0	(8)	(17)
Total Expenditure	65,632	27,293	28,589	(1,296)	(1,582)
Income					
Fees & Charges	-33	-12	-7	(5)	(14)
Rents	-82	-31	-31	0	0
Reimbursement & other Grant Income	-502	-277	-209	(68)	(212)
Transfer from reserve	-15	0	-1	1	(2)
Dedicated Schools Grant	-50	0	0	0	0
Government Grants	-13,477	-7,386	-7,386	0	0
Total Income	-14,159	-7,706	-7,634	(72)	(228)
Net Operational Expenditure	51,473	19,587	20,955	(1,368)	(1,810)
Recharges					
Premises Support	736	368	368	0	0
Transport	10	5	5	0	0
Central Support Recharges	3,331	1,666	1,666	0	0
Asset Rental Support	0	0	0	0	0
HBC Support Costs Income	-176	-108	-108	0	0
Net Total Recharges	3,901	1,931	1,931	0	0
Net Departmental Expenditure	55,374	21,518	22,886	(1,368)	(1,810)

Financial Position

The net departmental outturn position is estimated to be over budget profile at the end of financial year 2025/26 by £1.810m with the majority relating to Social Care Services.

Growth budget of £12.1m and £4m of Children's Improvement Fund has been provided to the Children's and Families Department for financial year 2025/26. Unfortunately, this has not been sufficient to support the increasing costs across the service

Since last reported at 31 July 25 there has been a reduction in overspend of £0.381m. It's important to remember that although there has been a reduction in forecast outturn the Children's and Families Department has received significant budget increases for 2025/26. The level of spend remains high across the service.

The Children's and Families Department remains an area of serious concern and the issues remain the same. The difficulty in the recruitment of social workers and the subsequent extortionate agency costs, along with the spiralling costs of residential placements. This has been an ongoing problem for a number of years.

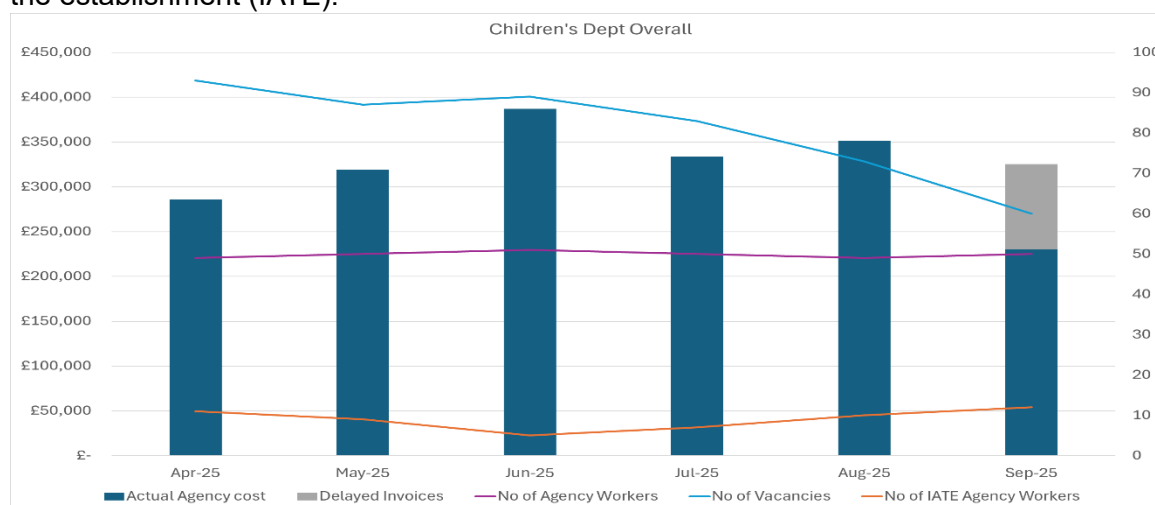
Employee Expenditure

Employee costs are forecast to be over budget profile by the end of financial year 2025/26 by £0.726 this is a reduction of £0.478m since last reported on 31 July 25. The reduction mainly relates to vacant posts that remain unfilled that are not being covered by agency and an increase in staffing budgets due to the higher than anticipated salary uplift costs.

The forecast overspend largely relates to the difficulty in recruitment across the service. A number of successful initiatives have helped support the recruitment including Social Work Academy and market supplements.

The level of agency has remained consistent since April across the service. There is an expectation that a number of agency staff are due to convert to Halton BC employees in the coming months and the recruitment of newly qualified social workers should reduce the level of agency reliance. Forecasts will be updated as and when to reflect the changes in staffing.

The chart below demonstrates agency costs that cover April to September 2025, the number of agency staff that the Council have received an invoice for within each period, the number of vacancies across the department and the number of staff that are currently in addition to the establishment (IATE).



Agency spend across the department remains high with spend totalling £1.907m.

One area of concern relates to the number of staff that remain in addition to the establishment (IATE). These are staff that are currently not allocated to an established role within their respective team. This figure currently stands at 12 across the service. Work should now be undertaken to reduce the level of staff that are in addition to the establishment if they do not form part of the redesign improvement plan.

Supplies and Services

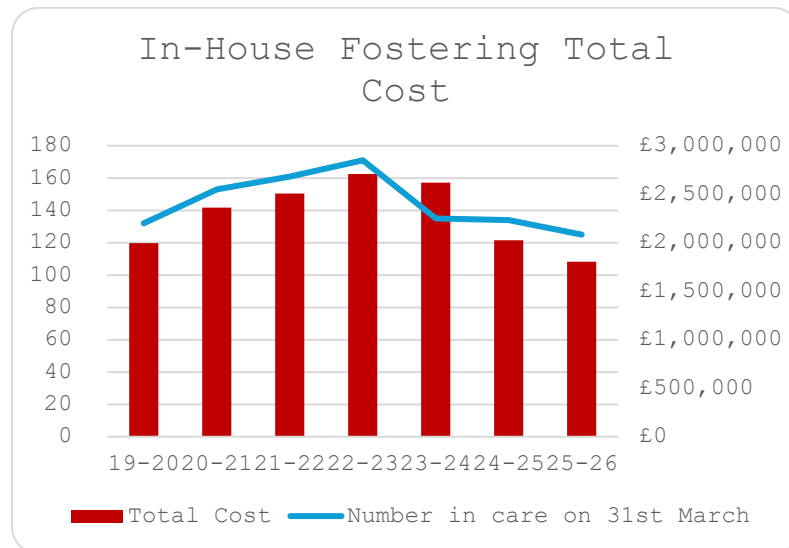
Supplies and services expenditure is forecast to be £0.584m over budget profile at the end of the financial year. Supplies and Services is diverse and covers a number of areas including nursery fees, consultancy, translation costs, equipment and support provided to young people.

A number of initiatives are being looked into to target specific areas of spend within supplies and services.

The creation of the Edge of Care and Family Time Teams should support the reduction of Supplies and Services expenditure. There is hope that particular tasks will no longer need to be outsourced which could result in the reduction in supplies and service.

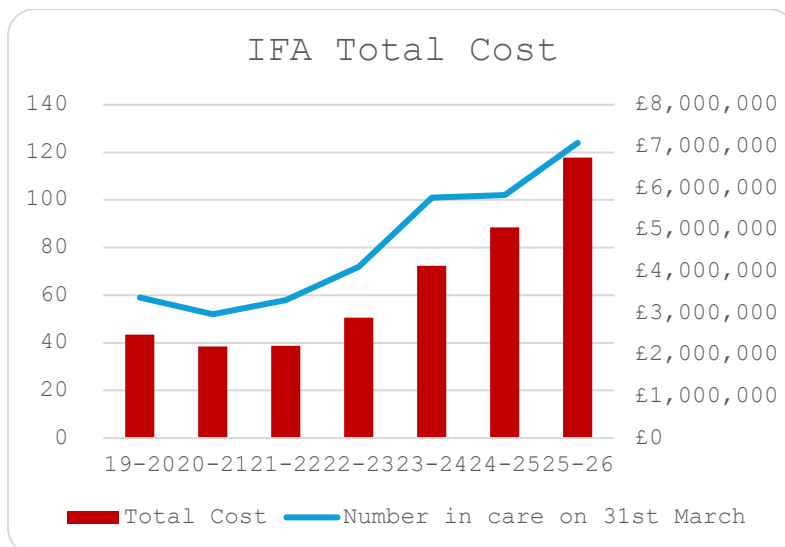
Fostering

Inhouse fostering placements is estimated to be £0.476m under budget profile for financial year 2025/26.



Work continues to recruit and retain Halton's In-house foster carers, along with training to develop carers enabling them to accommodate more specialist placements. This therefore means that costs could increase. However, the ability to accommodate young people within in-house provision provides a substantial saving in comparison to Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) or residential care.

Increasing numbers of children in care and insufficient in-house fostering provision has meant increased reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). Higher numbers of children placed within IFA provision and increased IFA rates has resulted in an estimated forecast overspend for the end of 2025/26 as £1.263m. This is an increase since last reported at 31 July 2025 of £0.193m.



Special Guardianship Order

Special Guardianship Order (SGO) at the end of financial year 2025/26 is estimated to be under budget profile by £0.129m

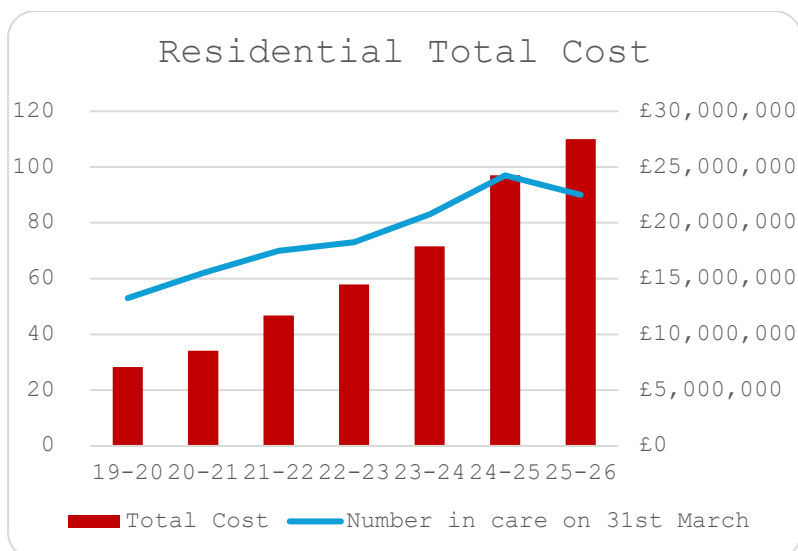
These are long term placements for young people, where the carers are granted parental responsibility for the young person in their care. This is a positive outcome for the young person as these are stable placements and the children are no longer classed as a 'child in care'. They are also less expensive than other placements.

Residential Care

Out of Borough Residential Care continues to be a budget pressure for the Children and Families Department as the costs of residential care have continued to rise year on year. The numbers of young people in residential placements remains high and the cost of placements is rising significantly year-on year.

Residential care costs are forecast to be over budget profile by £0.058m, this is a reduction in forecast overspend since last reported.

The graph below illustrates the rising costs of residential care, for consistency this does not include the costs of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) as these costs were not included previous years.



The table below demonstrates the number of children that the department are forecasting to be in Residential care at 31 March 26.

Provision	Weekly Costs	30-Sep-25	
		No. Placed	Estimated cost for the year
Residential	£1000 - £3000	5	445,567
Residential	£3001 - £5000	29	6,955,125
Residential	£5001 - £7000	21	6,557,922
Residential	£7001 - £15982	20	10,864,716
Secure	£6397 - £8137		
Leaving Care	£443 - £7175	14	2,264,902
Parent & Child	£2000 - £5500	1	424,412
Total:		90	27,512,643

Overall cost of packages are increasing due to the complexity of support the young people require as well as standard package cost increases. This is a national issue and market factors such as low supply and high demand have resulted in the costs of residential care packages rising significantly over the last year, meaning that the level of spend is unsustainable at the current rate.

A number of initiatives are taking place to try and address the issue including a High Cost Placement Panel where high cost packages are individually scrutinized to ensure the placement is right for the young person and at the best available cost for the placement.

UASC Residential Care

The number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) currently placed in care has remained steady.

Funding for the period April to August 2026 has been agreed and is higher than anticipated. The estimated forecast income for this financial year is expected to cover the residential expenditure for our UASC cohort.

The table below demonstrates the estimated costs of residential accommodation for UASC

		30-Sep-25	
Provision	Weekly Costs	No. Placed	Estimated cost for the year
UASC	£300-£500	24	334,319
UASC	£500-£5000	25	979,411
Total:		49	1,313,730

Income

Children and Families are forecast to underachieve on income for financial year 2025/26 by £0.228m. The underachievement relates to the reduction in joint funded packages care packages with the NHS and a number of historic joint funded invoices that are likely to be credited.

2025/26 Approved Savings

£1.922m of approved savings have been included in the departmental budget for 2025/26, details of those savings are included at Appendix A.

Approved 2024/25 Savings

Appendix A

Service Area	Net Budget £'000	Description of Saving Proposal	Savings Value		Current Progress	Comments
			25/26 Agreed Council 01 February 2023 £'000	25/26 Agreed Council 05 March 2025 £'000		
Children's Centres	1,293	Review the operation of Windmill Hill Children's Centre, where there is the potential to save on premises and staffing costs.	22	0		With the implementation of the family hubs the review of windmill hill will no longer be viable. The centre is located in an area of deprivation and the role of the centre as a family hub is a priority in the children's social care review and supporting families at an earlier level, improving access to services for the most vulnerable and ensure a positive start for all children. These priorities fit with the council priorities
Children's Residential Care		Residential Placements – continuation of the work being undertaken to review residential placements, especially high cost placements, and identify opportunities to step-down placements or find alternatives, in order to reduce the current overspend and ongoing costs.	0	1,500		Residential placements were all reviewed in early 2024 with some reduction in costs established. As part of the longer term plan included in the sufficiency strategy, Halton has partnered with a not for profit organisation, Juno, who are awaiting registration from OFSTED - this approach is part of the LCR approach working with NFP organisations. In addition significant changes have been

						made to reduce the numbers of children coming into care. Mocking bird constellation is in place and evidenced support has resulted in appropriate transition so the need for residential is mitigated. A property has been identified for care leavers and further properties identified for additional semi-independent provisions. Juno will focus on their second home after July
Fostering		Independent Fostering Agencies and Out of Borough Fostering – continuation of the work being undertaken to review placements, to increase use of In-Borough foster carers wherever possible and thereby reduce costs, in order to reduce the current overspend and ongoing costs.	0	200	u	Recruitment campaign has been launched to attract in house foster carers so Council reliance on IFA's is reduced. Unfortunately there is a national shortage of foster carers and as a result the reliance on IFA's continues
Legal Costs		Court Costs – implementation of measures in conjunction with Legal Services, to reduce the backlog and ongoing number of Children's cases going to court, thereby reducing the timescales involved and cost of court proceedings, in order to reduce	0	200	u	Progress has been made on reducing the cost of court with success in reducing the number of applications, the reduction in timeliness of proceedings, further work is currently underway to reduce the number of C2 applications to court. PLO process is proving effective for some families in diverting away from legal proceedings and safely

		the current overspend and ongoing costs.				maintaining children with parents, further exploration is taking place on the use of in house psychologists to undertake assessments in the court arena to further reduce court costs
Total Children & Families Department			22	1,900		

Education, Inclusion & Provision Department**Revenue Budget as at 30 September 2025**

	Annual Budget £'000	Budget to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure					
Employees	8,818	4,068	3,929	139	279
Agency - covering vacancies	0	0	101	(101)	(204)
Agency - in addition to establishment	66	72	72	0	6
Premises	15	7	1	6	2
Supplies & Services	3,059	1,416	1,438	(22)	(44)
Independent School Fees	10,155	5,915	5,915	0	0
Schools Contingency	400	126	126	0	0
Transport	43	11	23	(12)	(20)
Schools Transport	2,774	747	1,115	(368)	(737)
Early Years Payments including Pupil Premium	15,615	7,085	7,085	0	0
Commissioned Services	2,193	851	847	4	9
Inter Authority Special Needs	1,402	954	954	0	0
Grants to Voluntary Organisations	115	0	17	(17)	(67)
Capital Finance	4,604	2,135	2,135	0	1
Total Expenditure	49,259	23,387	23,758	(371)	(775)
Income					
Fees & Charges Income	-296	-184	-228	44	30
Government Grant Income	-6,545	-3,502	-3,534	32	0
Dedicated Schools Grant	-30,153	-15,077	-15,077	0	0
Inter Authority Income	-446	-165	-59	(106)	(211)
Reimbursements & Other Grant Income	-1,764	-836	-836	0	(5)
Schools SLA Income	-565	-281	-237	(44)	(60)
Transfer From Reserves	-498	-142	-142	0	0
Total Income	-40,267	-20,187	-20,113	(74)	(246)
Net Operational Expenditure	8,992	3,200	3,645	(445)	(1,021)
Recharges					
Premises Support	405	203	203	0	0
Transport Support	773	489	489	0	(5)
Central Support	1,947	973	973	0	0
Asset Rental Support	17	0	0	0	0
Recharge Income	0	0	0	0	0
Net Total Recharges	3,142	1,665	1,665	0	(5)
Net Departmental Expenditure	12,134	4,865	5,310	(445)	(1,026)

Financial Position

Net departmental expenditure is £0.445m over budget at the end of September, based on available information. The forecast outturn for 2025/26 is currently an overspend against budget of £1.026m. The main variances are school transport, Inter Authority Income and schools SLA income.

Employee Expenditure

Employee expenditure, including agency staff, is forecast to be £0.081m under budget at year end. There are a number of vacant positions across the department some of which are filled by agency staff, estimated to be £0.204m for the year.

Schools Transport

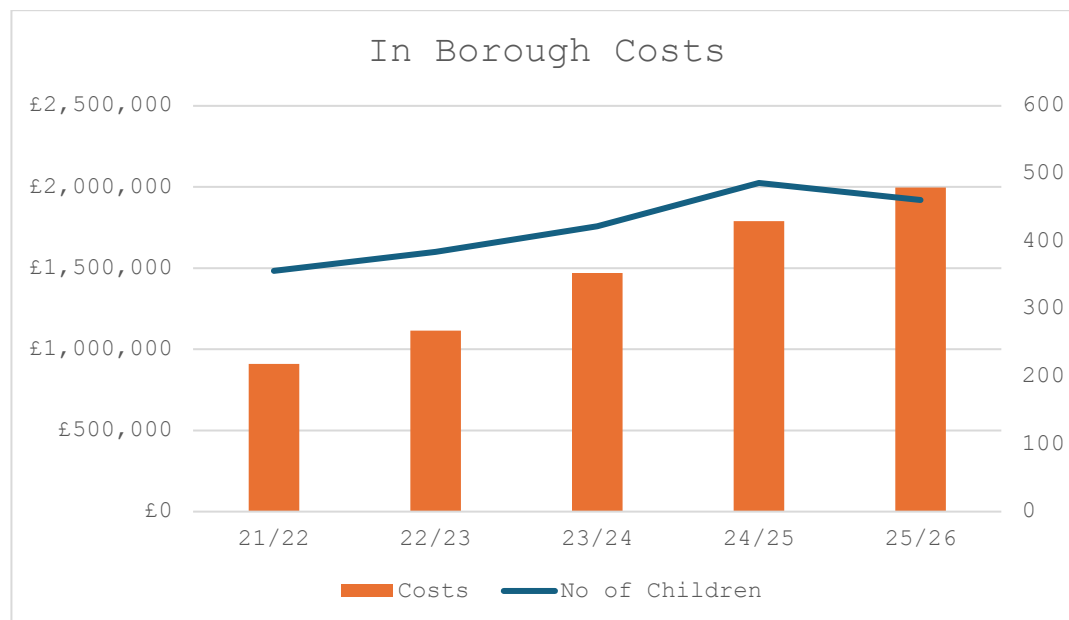
Schools Transport is the main budgetary demand pressure for Education, Inclusion and Provision. The Council has a statutory responsibility to provide Special Educational Needs (SEN) pupils with transport. This is split into two main areas of SEN pupils attending In Borough and out of Borough Schools.

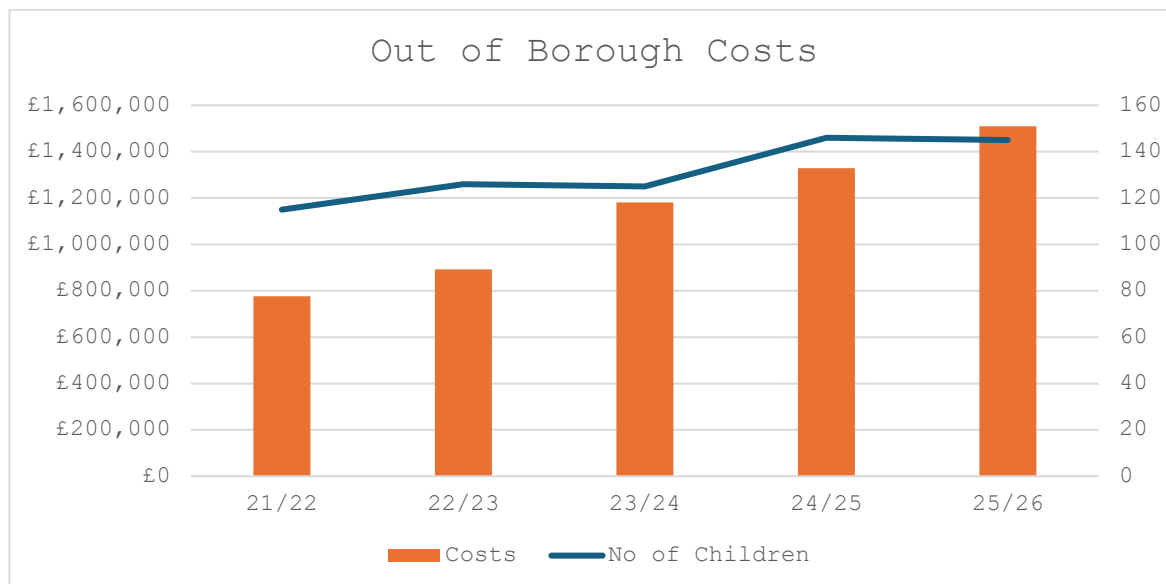
The table below illustrates the split between the two areas, and how each areas spend compares to the budget.

2025-26 as at Sep-25					
Area	Number of Users	Budget £000	Projected Spend £000	Variance £000	Average Cost per User
In Borough	461	1857	1997	(140)	£3,930.40
Out of Borough	145	1214	1510	(296)	£9,263.98
Total	606	3071	3508	(437)	

The current records show 606 service users, the majority of which attend schools within the Borough. The Out of Borough overspend has decreased compared to the previous year's overspend of £0.799m due to £0.712m added to the budget in 2025/26 for growth. The demand for the School Transport service appears to have stabilised for the moment at least. The graphs below show the number of SEN children using this service. It is too early to say whether the levelling off will continue or merely represents a blip, with demand increasing in future years in line with the historical and national trends.

The graphs below show the trend in the number of SEN children using this service and the associated costs.





It is worth noting that this situation is not unique to Halton and is a burden across all Councils nationwide.

The overspend position is also due to efficiency savings of £0.300m for Home to School Transport to undertake a consultation with stakeholders and partners with regard to implementing a new Home to School and College Travel and Transport Policy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. The consultation has been completed, and the results have been analysed and recommendations will be put forward for review. However, it is too early to say if the savings can be achieved.

Grants to Voluntary Organisations

Grants to Voluntary Organisations is forecast to be over budget by £0.067m at year end. This is due to the Positive Behaviour Service. The department pays a contribution to this service each year, however, the cost is significantly higher than the budget.

Income

Inter Authority income is projected to underachieve its target by £0.211m. This is due to an underachievement of income within the Integrated Youth Support Services & Commissioning Division for a shared service. The income target has remained the same despite the number of participating authorities reducing since quarter 1 last year. The income target exceeds the budget for missing from home and care.

Approved 2025/26 Savings

Please see Appendix A for full details.

Capital Projects as at 30 September 2025

Scheme Detail	205/26 Original Allocation £000	2025/26 Revised Allocation £000	Cumulative Spend to 30 Sept 2025 £000	Cumulative Forecast Spend to 30 Nov 2025 £000	Cumulative Forecast Spend to 31 Jan 2026 £000	Cumulative Forecast Spend to 31 March 2026 £000	Allocation remaining £000	2026/27 Forecast Allocation £000
Childrens Directorate								
Capital Repairs	882.1	882.1	700	700	700	754.0	128.1	0.0
Asbestos Management	10.0	10.0	0.5	0.5	6	10.0	0.0	0.0
Schools Access Initiative	37.7	37.7	13	13	30	41.0	-3.3	0.0
Basic Need Projects	600.8	600.8	0	0	0	100.0	500.8	0.0
Small Capital Works	173.0	173.0	90	90	105	170.0	3.0	0.0
SEND capital allocation	1,871.2	1,871.2	148	148	675	1,275.0	596.2	45.0
SEND capital unallocated	1,775.5	1,775.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1,775.5	0.0
SCA unallocated	129.3	129.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	129.3	0.0
Family Hubs & Start for Life	63.0	63.0	4.5	35.0	48.0	63	0.0	0.0
Childcare Expansion	314.8	314.8	18	18	18	314.8	0.0	0.0
AMP Data	25.0	25.0	23	23	24	25.0	0.0	0.0
Childrens Directorate Total	5,882.4	5,882.4	997.0	1,027.5	1,606.0	2,752.8	3,129.6	45.0

Comments on the above figures

The majority of the Capital Repair work has been procured and has been completed over the summer holidays.

Property Services are updating asbestos management surveys throughout the year and carrying out remedial works where necessary.

The Schools Access Initiative 2025/26 application process has been completed and works carried out over the summer holidays.

Basic Needs Projects is currently unallocated and the balance of £0.501m is to be re-profiled to 2026/27.

SEND Capital Allocation, Ashley School expansion is in planning stage and work expected to start in the autumn and completed in summer 2026.

Childcare Expansion discussions are ongoing for allocating the funding to early years providers.

CAD Plan updates are on an ad hoc basis following capital works and condition surveys are commissioned on a 5 year cycle.

Small Capital Works are ad hoc on emergency, health and safety issues.

EDUCATION, INCLUSION AND PROVISION DEPARTMENT

Review of Agreed Savings

APPENDIX A

Service Area	Net Budget £'000	Description of Saving Proposal	Savings Value		Current Progress	Comments
			25/26 Agreed Council 01 February 2023 £'000	25/26 Agreed Council 05 March 2025 £'000		
Home to School Transport		Home to School Transport – undertake consultation with stakeholders and partners with regard to implementing a new Home to School and College Travel and Transport Policy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.	0	300	u	The consultation with stakeholders and partners has taken place. The results have been analysed and recommendations put to Executive Board for possible policy changes.
Total EIP Department			0	300		

REPORT TO:	Children Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board
DATE:	10 November 2025
REPORTING OFFICER:	Executive Director of Children's Services
PORTFOLIO:	Children Young People and Families
SUBJECT:	Quarterly Report from the Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership
WARD(S)	Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to enable the Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership to provide an update to the Children, Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board of reassurance being achieved and includes how the Partnership is addressing areas for improvement identified in the Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) Business Plan, the inspection of Halton local authority children's services (May 2024), the most recent annual report and Working Together 2023.
- 1.2 The key priorities for development or improvement were agreed by strategic leaders and included in the HSCP Business Plan 2024-27.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: that

- 1) The Board acknowledge the report and current Executive position.**
- 2) The Board continues to receive updates on progress against the HSCP Business Plan objectives and the Annual Report's recommendations, and the ancillary work of the various sub-groups and task and finish groups.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 During QTR 1, the HSCP has RAG rated itself against the Family First Partnership MASA requirements. The majority of standards were identified as green with no red. However, there are some standards in relation to independent scrutiny that need consolidating.

3.2 Key Achievements

- The start of weekly multi-agency contextual safeguarding sub-group meetings mean referrals are now scrutinised robustly and support instigated in a timelier manner. The revamp of CSOG also means that these monthly meetings focus on identifying themes and trends of concerns and planning multi-agency actions to mitigate any emerging patterns of concern.
- Learning recommendations from all CSPRs are now scrutinised and gaps in current safeguarding provision identified. The CSPR Triage Group consistently make cogent observations before circulating these to relevant subgroups and partner agencies for actioning.
- Procedures for all multi-agency strategy meetings and discussions have been enhanced with tighter timescales being applied and attendance consistently at 100% across the 4 core partners.
- Course attendance at multi-agency training events is over 85% for the last 6 months (from 56%) with total attendance also increasing. This reflects the rich training offer, led by a host of partner agencies.
- The HSCP continues to embed the Lundy Model principles across multi-agency practice. We have started to improve the way we collect the opinions of children (voice), the places where such views are sourced (space), the people that listen to these opinions (audience) and the impact of such dialogue (influence). Further work is needed in QTR 2 and 3 as we continue to ensure all partner agencies practice the key tenets of Lundy.

3.3 Areas Requiring Continued Focus

- Data/Scorecards: there needs to be more systematic analysis of the multiagency data/scorecards with a focus on what the data means for the child.
- Transitional Safeguarding: more work is needed to ensure there is a seamless transition as young people become adults.
- Threshold application: scrutiny work tells us that threshold application can be inconsistent across agencies, resulting in inconsistent responses to risk.
- Embedding learning: greater attention needs to be directed to embedding learning and revisiting areas where gaps were previously identified so the HSCP can confidently report on qualitative and quantitative impact and outcomes respectively.

3.4 Strategic Priorities for the HSCP

1. Improving the quality and timeliness of our practice in relation to neglect.
2. Safeguarding Children from Violence and Exploitation
3. Protecting Children as victims of Domestic Abuse

The HSCP Annual Report for 2025 provides a detailed account on each of the priority areas, including:

- why we chose it
- what we have done
- what was the impact for young people
- what we need to do to make more progress in the future.

[HSCP-Annual-Report-2024.25-final.pdf](#).

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The HSCP continues to collaborate with the Pan Cheshire partners in addressing shared issues. Some of the shared projects and policy reviews currently being undertaken include the following:

- ✦ Pre-Birth Protocol and Guidance: signed off during QTR 1.
- ✦ Private Fostering: a task and finish group is currently reviewing the Pan Cheshire protocol as all regions report very low numbers of reported cases, suggesting potential under-reporting.
- ✦ Missing from Home Protocol (latest iteration makes reference to Operation Philomena that was not referenced in earlier version). Sign off imminent.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 No immediate financial implications. Financial report for HSCP to be included in next report to Children, Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

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

The Integrated care board provides assurance that children who are not brought to health appointments are responded to in a timely manner. Since QTR 1, all health providers have provided the HSCP significant assurance that they have robust policies in place. Furthermore, these are monitored quarterly against key performance indicators. Thus, Health members confidently report that effective

systems and processes are in place. (Sept 2025)

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

A review of the Halton Neglect Strategy and the accompanying Practice Standards and Guidance has placed a greater focus on Educational Neglect and boosting school attendance. This is seen as key in enhancing the future employment opportunities of children in Halton. Thus, a multi-agency training event took place on 17th September titled 'School Attendance is Everyone's Business' which was attended by nearly 100 multi-agency practitioners. In addition, the Vulnerable Learners Board is now scrutinising on a quarterly basis the attendance of our most vulnerable learners to help ensure partners are robust and responsive in ensuring children engage in learning.

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

The HSCP is collaborating with the Centre for Expertise and the NW Multi-Agency Safeguarding Learning and Support Hub by completing a mock JTAI questionnaire focusing on Child Sexual Abuse (True for Us: Self-Assessment).

The responses from partners will help the SCP to identify areas where further training, resources, support etc are needed. The completion date for this piece of work was 3/10/25 with a findings report to be presented to the Quality and Impact Group on 21/10/25. A new North West CSA Strategy has also been recently shared. The Business Unit is currently shaping an implementation plan to disseminate across the partnership.

[Self-Assessment "True to Us" – Focus on Child Sexual Abuse \(Page 1 of 6\)](#)

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

During QTR 1, the HSCP has worked closely with the Safer Halton Partnership and the Halton Safeguarding Adults Board in revisiting the Pan Cheshire All Age Exploitation Strategy. Together we have produced a baseline assessment of where we feel Halton is in relation to the 4 P approach

(Prosecution/Prevention/Protection/Partnership). The baselines of the other Pan Cheshire Partnerships are currently being distilled so a Cheshire wide approach can be adopted for areas where gaps have been identified by each of the four Cheshire regions.

Tackling the widespread increase in ketamine use amongst our young people continues to be a key multi-agency objective. As a result of the PCC funding in 2024/25, multi-agency partners now

have a sound awareness of the damaging health impacts caused by ketamine-nearly 300 practitioners have attended ketamine awareness raising events. Further grant funding for 2025/26 has been secured via the PCC enabling the HSCP to continue its awareness raising activities. It is expected that some of the new grant funding will be directed towards funding workshops with young people and awareness raising activities in respect of parents/carers.

6.5 **Working Towards a Greener Future**

None.

6.6 **Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

None.

7.0 **Risk Analysis**

7.1 Since the start of QTR 1 (2025/26) the only change to the HSCP Risk Register was to remove one risk as it is no longer proving a barrier for partnership. This recognises the increase in trainers and organisations contributing to the HSCP Training Offer, as evidenced in the extensive training offer below:

[2025-2026-Training-Calendar-05-25.pdf](#)

In addition, the digital offer is also expanding which is giving greater flexibility as to when organisations choose to deliver their training with a multi-agency content.

[Digital Learning - Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 One of the themes explored in the Learning Circle for Group R (9/10/25) was ethnicity. However, professionals at the multi-agency learning event were satisfied that this incident was not motivated by ethnicity.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 Not applicable.

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

10.1 'None under the meaning of the Act.'

HALTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP
YEARLY REPORT 2024/25

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1. Foreword:

Welcome to Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership's annual report which covers our work in 2024/25. It provides an overview of this year's multiagency safeguarding activity and reflects the hard work and commitment of all our partner agencies. Furthermore, the annual report evidences our response to new and emerging risks and the strength of the work to safeguard children in Halton.

As the Delegated Safeguarding Partners for the Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP), our role is to ensure appropriate scrutiny of the effectiveness of our joint safeguarding arrangements and provide support and challenge to our local system partners. This report offers an opportunity for us to demonstrate our shared accountability and commitment to transparency of our local strengths and challenges.

The report is set out in a way which highlights the areas identified in last year's report where additional focus was needed, the work of the partners to address those areas, the impact this had and where further activity is still required. In addition, the work of the HSCP is underpinned by a commitment to promoting a culture of continuous learning and improvement across organisations and the annual report provides an overview of our shared learning and improvement activities including multi-agency audits and learning reviews, their impact and priorities for the coming year.

This annual report will detail some of the incredible work that has been undertaken in the safeguarding arena, and recognise the hard work, determination and dedication of colleagues who take their safeguarding responsibilities incredibly seriously and work tirelessly to keep children, young people and the most vulnerable in our communities safe.

As safeguarding partners, we are committed to working together effectively, embracing challenges, celebrating successes, and fostering continuous learning across the system to drive improvement. Safeguarding children is a shared responsibility, with their welfare as the top priority. By collaborating across organisations and agencies, we ensure that everyone recognises their role and fulfils their responsibilities to safeguard and support children effectively.

The past year has seen both challenges and opportunities in our shared mission to protect the most vulnerable members of our community. Through our multi-agency work, we have strengthened our partnerships, ensuring that the voices of children and young people are heard and that their safety and welfare remain at the heart of everything we do. Indeed, the creation of our Children and Young People's Plan and commitment to the Lundy Model embodies our desire to involve children at every possible opportunity. Furthermore, our focus has also been on improving early intervention with regard to neglect, identifying risks promptly, and ensuring that children and families receive the support they need at the right time.

This report highlights the progress we have made in achieving our strategic objectives and key initiatives and provides an overview of the challenges we face moving forward. As statutory partners, we remain committed to working together to continue improving our safeguarding practices and making a real difference in the lives of children across Halton.

However, we are aware that there remain challenges that we must overcome as a partnership in the year ahead. This includes managing organisational change across our statutory partners, addressing gaps in our approach to measure impact, further enhancing our collaboration with other local partnerships, and continuing to strengthen the quality, breadth, and scrutiny of our multi-agency dataset.

Therefore, our yearly report recognises the progress that has been made in working together to keep children safe from harm, the challenges that have been met and the work ahead of us. We are grateful to all our partners and their dedicated front-line staff for their support and steadfast commitment to safeguarding children in Halton. Safeguarding is a collective effort and without them we would not be able to achieve the ambitions of our partnership.

Zoe Fearon

**Executive Director of Children's Services
Halton Borough Council**



Denise Roberts

**Associate Director of Quality and Safety Improvement
NHS Cheshire and Merseyside**



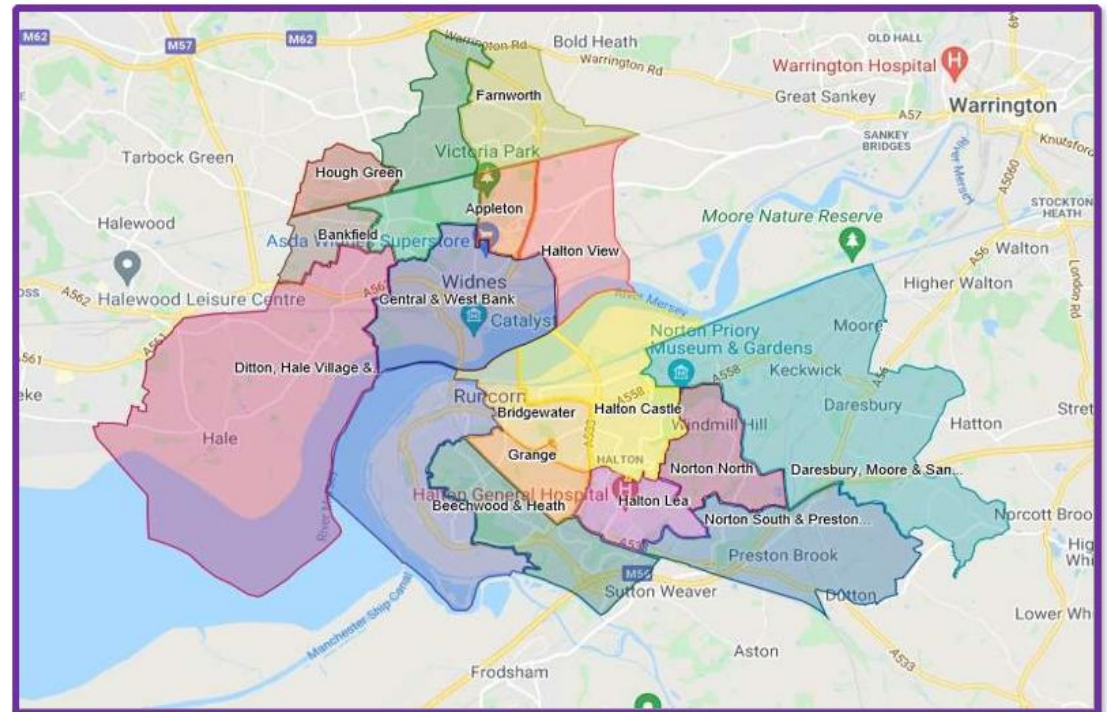
Carlos Brunes

**Detective Chief Superintendent
Cheshire Constabulary**



2. Halton at a Glance

- Halton is a deprived borough, relative to England as a whole it is the 23rd most deprived of 317 districts.
- Almost 1 in 5 children under 16 are living in relative poverty in Halton. 56% live in the 20% most deprived parts of the country.
- For most health-related indicators, Halton fairs worse than NW and England.
- Fewer Halton children receive early developmental checks—up to and including the 2-2.5-year check—than the regional average but checks are better than England average.
- Lower proportions achieve a good level of development at 2-2.5-year check and by end of Reception year.
- A&E attendance rates are the highest in England, the majority being under age 5. As a result, hospital admissions are also higher.
- Admissions due to injuries are a significant problem, a leading cause of A&E attendance and the top cause of emergency admissions. Rates are statistically above England, but the gap has narrowed as rates have fallen.
- Halton has higher rates of vulnerable children & young people than national average.
- Halton has higher levels of SEND. Speech, Language & Communication problems as well as Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs are the top reasons.
- Number of Looked After Children (per 10,000) 134
- Average Level 8 attainment-42.8
- The under 18 conception rate is 22 per 1000, nearly twice as high as the English average (13 per 1000).
- The rate of Children subject to Child Protection Plans is 72 per 10,000, which is nearly twice the national average of 43 per 10,000 and higher than the Northwest (49)
- 42% of children aged 11 are classed as overweight.
- 24.1% of children in Halton live in relative poverty and this figure is rising.





27,546

Children & Young People



1 in 3

Children & Young People
Live in Poverty



18.6%

Of Children & Young People
Have SEND support



1782

Referrals to
Children's Social Care

What's it like to be a child in Halton?



77.2%

Of schools are judged
good or outstanding



1,295

Children in Need

386



Children and young
people are
looked after

1 in 3

Children aged 11
overweight





3. Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership

The Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) is a statutory, multi-organisation partnership coordinated by a Business Unit, which oversees and leads children's safeguarding across the Halton area. The Safeguarding Partnership is essential because no single agency can fully address the complex and multi-faceted risks that children may face. By working together, safeguarding partners can share information, resources, and expertise, ensuring that vulnerable children are identified early, supported effectively, and protected from potential harm.

The Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership local safeguarding arrangements [Structure & Sub Groups - Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership](#) provide detail about how safeguarding services are arranged and supported to meet the needs of our children and families. These arrangements were reviewed in 2024 following Working Together to Safeguarding Children 2023 and the new arrangements were published in December 2024.

3.1 How the HSCP is Structured: [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#) requires Safeguarding Children Partnerships to have processes in place to provide assurance that multi-agency practice is reviewed and operating well. The Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership continue to improve how we collaborate, scrutinise, assure, and drive the coordination of safeguarding activity. Within the partnership each sub-group has a clear term of reference and a Delivery Plan which align with the strategic priorities for the partnership. The HSCP Executive is made up of the three Delegated Safeguarding Partners (DSP) and Education as a 'fourth' core partner and have joint responsibility to ensure effective multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. DSPs chair the partnership on a rotational basis. For 2024/25 the chair of the Executive was Zoe Fearon (Executive Director of Children's Services, Halton Borough Council).

The HSCP has a structure of sub-groups who lead on the statutory requirements and shared priorities, reporting to and seeking feedback from both the HSCP Strategic Leadership Group and the Executive group on their work and impact. Sub-groups are chaired by and made up of representatives from across the Safeguarding Partnership's member organisations. The HSCP structure can be found [Halton Multi-agency Partnership Arrangements – June 2024](#)

The purpose of our yearly report is to reflect upon the effectiveness of services and the impact we have made together in the past year. The report sets out national and local contexts and it includes what has been achieved in our strategic priorities and workplans. It includes key findings from scrutiny activity and the steps we have taken in response. Recommendations from child practice reviews have been applied to learning. It links in with the work of other partnerships across Halton partnerships and includes activity in relation to the way we garner the voices of children and young people. Our quality assurance work includes

performance data and how this is used to help us identify where we are doing well and where we can do better. Data for this year's report has improved but continues to be an area we are developing with the support of our local northwest networks.

3.2 Our Shared Partnership Vision

We are committed to ensuring that vulnerable children and families in Halton are provided with high quality support and protection and achieve the best possible outcomes. Our mission statement is:

“To work together to enable children and young people in Halton to live a life free from fear, harm, abuse, and exploitation, and ensure that every child is safe, thriving and heard.”

The objectives of the Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership are to:

- Co-produce with children, young people and families using their strengths and assets to develop services to meet their individual needs.
- Provide robust independent scrutiny and assurance to the partnership in relation to safeguarding and the welfare of children and young people in Halton.
- Make children's safeguarding personal and swift so they remain in families, in school.
- Build children, young people, and families' resilience.
- Drive an even stronger partnership with schools, colleges, and local agencies.
- Ensure children and young people are safeguarded in their wider community from exploitation.

To help meet these objectives, the safeguarding partners have agreed to:

- Work collaboratively and creatively with children, young people and families using their strengths and assets.
- Lead on engaging with relevant agencies to ensure collective responsibility for building children's resilience and safeguarding.



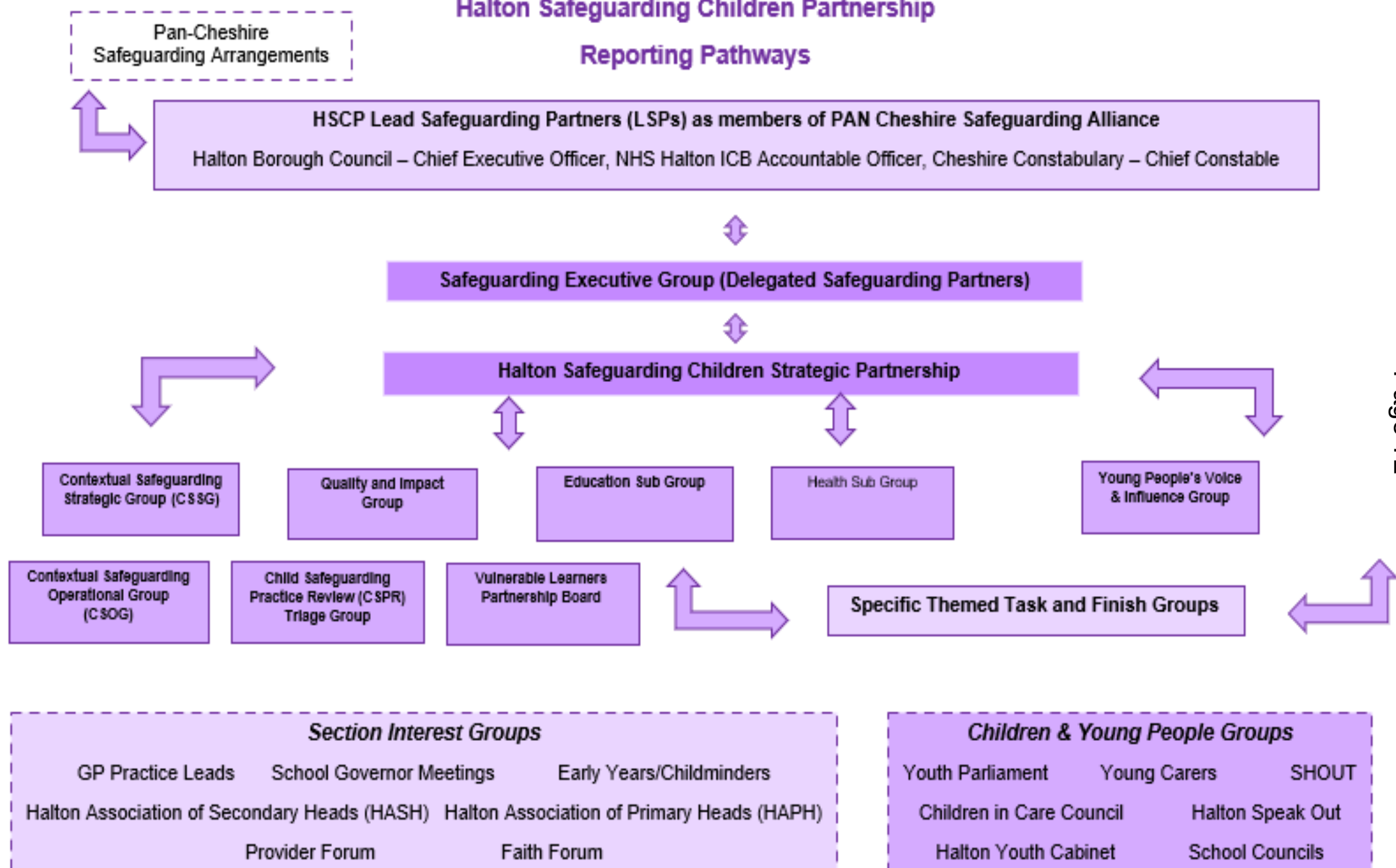
- Further develop and promote the best of what already exists in Halton and think innovatively about multi-agency practice to improve outcomes relating to children's resilience and safeguarding.
- Lead on system change and work across the wider policy and partnerships landscape to develop and implement new ways of working and to identify opportunities to co-locate services that reduces duplication, improves practice and outcomes for children across the safeguarding pathway.
- Continue to develop our independent scrutiny framework to provide high levels of assurance across the children's safeguarding pathway.



The wider reporting arrangements agreed by the HSCP as a result of the diagnostic review that followed Working Together 2023 are captured below:

Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership

Reporting Pathways



3.3 Governance Arrangements

The updated Working Together 2023 guidance notes that the head of each statutory safeguarding partner will be referred to as the 'Lead Safeguarding Partner' (LSP), who will in turn appoint a 'Delegated Safeguarding Partner' (DSP).

The Lead Safeguarding Partners (LSP) group is the group within the Pan Cheshire Safeguarding Alliance that leads and drives the changes that the government have set out. The group is responsible for setting the Pan Cheshire strategic direction, vision, and culture of all-age Pan Cheshire safeguarding arrangements. This group is made up of the head of each statutory safeguarding partner agency. The Alliance covers the Local Authority geographical jurisdiction of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton, and Warrington. Meeting on a Pan-Cheshire basis enables a sub-regional collaboration across Cheshire and Warrington aligned to the Cheshire Constabulary footprint, and covering 4 out of the 9 ICB places. The Alliance brings together the Lead Safeguarding Partners from each of the Statutory agencies (Chief Executive of ICB, CEX of the four Local Authorities, Chief Police Constable). Representation of Education as the future 4th Statutory partner is under consideration). On behalf of their organisations the LSPs speak with authority, take decisions, and commit them on policy, resourcing, and practice matters. The LSP group is established, robust and effective, with a clear commitment from partners to review and improve working methods, building on strengths and innovation within the strong partnership relationships that exist.

The Pan Cheshire Safeguarding Alliance is the high-level, over-arching local governance partnership that primarily focuses on safeguarding systems, performance, and resourcing. Safeguarding Alliance meetings take place 3 times per year, with exception meetings being arranged if an issue of Pan-Cheshire significance arises. The LSPs hold responsibility for the implementation of recommendations and learning from serious incidents, local and national child safeguarding practice reviews, although elements of monitoring these can be delegated. Standing agenda items for the Pan Cheshire Safeguarding Alliance include:

- i. Highlight report from each Local Safeguarding Partnership Board in respect of progress against their action plan.
- ii. Review of relevant Pan-Cheshire partnership themes from any inspection activity
- iii. Approval of annual reports
- iv. Review of financial arrangements for the alliance, and any related local issues
- v. Horizon scanning of any national learning or developments, including opportunities to collaborate Pan-Cheshire
- vi. Learning from local and national case reviews.

The Alliance is supported by Delegated Safeguarding Partners from each of the Statutory Agencies.

The Delegated Safeguarding Partners (DSP): The Safeguarding Executive:

The Executive Group sit directly under the LSP, this group consists of the three statutory partners and Education as 'fourth' partner:

- Halton Children's Services (Zoe Fearon)



- Integrated Care Board (Denise Roberts)
- Cheshire Police (Carlos Brunes)
- Education (Ben Holmes)

Executive meetings focus upon the rapid and decisive partnership action required to safeguard Halton children, young people and families who are at risk of harm and abuse. All the delegated safeguarding partners have equal and joint responsibility for local safeguarding arrangements. The Executive Group meet on a quarterly basis, focusing on scrutiny and assurance regarding key practice and safeguarding priorities. The meetings allow the Chair of the Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership Strategic Group the opportunity to provide evidence regarding the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements for children, whilst allowing the Executive Group the opportunity to challenge, scrutinise and seek assurance around this work.

3.4 Contributions of the 3 safeguarding partners to the partnership arrangements

The Police, ICB and Local Authority partnership leads share the Chairing of the Executive on an annual basis. Police currently chair the Executive having replaced the local authority in June 2025. In terms of sub-group chairing, the ICB chair the Health Operational Group, and the Police chair the Contextual Safeguarding Sub-Group and the Contextual Safeguarding Operational Group. The Local Authority currently chair the Strategic Partnership, the Young People Voice and Influence Group and the Quality and Impact Group. Furthermore, Education chair the Safeguarding Education Subgroup and the Vulnerable Learners Board. Finally, the HSCP Business Manager is the chair for the CSPR Triage Group. All roles operate on an annual basis, although they change at different intervals in the year, rather than all the chair roles changing at the same time. Wherever possible, the current vicechair steps up to become the chair of their respective subgroup.

3.5 Education at an Operational and a Strategic Level

Safeguarding partners have ensured there is adequate representation and input from education at both the operational and strategic levels of the arrangements. Historically, Education has enjoyed strong representation across the Partnership with the Director for Education and the Head of the Virtual School represented at the Executive. Furthermore, a Safeguarding Education Sub-Group comprises of safeguarding leads and/or Headteachers from a swathe of educational settings including Early Years, FE and Colleges, PRU, the independent sector, and primary and secondary schools. Following the publication of Working Together 2023, the role of Education has been enhanced further with the creation of a Vulnerable Learners Board that provides a focused multi-agency response to improving attendance, behaviour, and outcomes for the most vulnerable learners across the region.

Business Unit: The Partnership Business Unit undertake the management and support function of the partnership. Some of this support function includes facilitating subgroup meetings, overseeing the HSCP training offer, creating/amending strategies, and supervising learning reviews. The Business Unit staffing has remained stable over the past 12 months, allowing the team to grow in their skills and confidence to support the wider partnership. However, there remains a gap with no Quality Assurance Officer in post, something recognised by the HSCP on their risk register. The Business Unit continues to plan and move forward with joint strategic work with other partnerships within the region, making best use of some of the working practices and skill set of a diverse range of practitioners.

3.6 Overview of the Partnership's Subgroup Activities:

HSCP Strategic Leadership Group: During 2024-2025 the HSCP included five principal sub-groups, all of whom report to the HSCP Strategic Leadership Group. This group is central to decision making, having oversight to the entire cycle of reflective activities. This includes assurance and review, response and delivery, actions resulting from learning and the safeguarding experience of children, young people, and practitioners. In addition, the HSCP Strategic Leadership Group have responsibility for ensuring that the selected work priorities are delivered in such a way that they make a positive impact on the outcomes for children and young people in Halton. The five groups that report to the HSCP Strategic Leadership Group are:

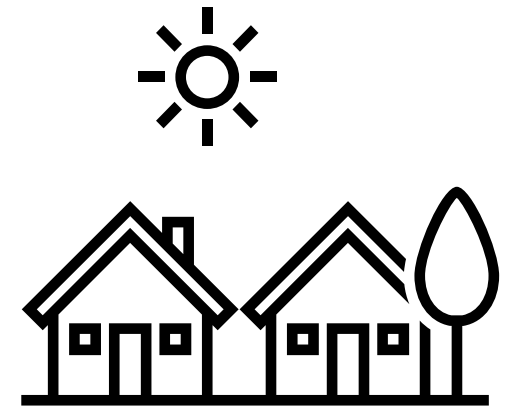
- Quality and Impact Group (QIG)
- Contextual Safeguarding Strategic Group (CSSG)
- Health Subgroup
- Education Subgroup
- Young People Voice and Influence Group

Quality and Impact Group (QIG): The purpose of this group is to support, develop and improve frontline practice so that children and families are provided with robust, multi-agency support plans from Early Help to Child Protection and Pre-Proceedings. This group also takes a lead role, on behalf of the Partnership for performance and quality assurance by monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the work conducted by partners. The Group takes forward key actions and improvements identified by strategic leaders and the Safeguarding Partnership Executive and plans and coordinates learning activities. This will include learning from Local Safeguarding Practice Reviews and learning from national best practice.



Key achievements during 2024-2025:

- ✓ Revised the Quality Assurance Framework so multi-agency audits, S11 and s175 audits, CSPR Triage and Training reports are mapped onto our QA Plan on a Page and scheduled on an annual basis.
- ✓ They have analysed national learning and considered local learning themes with the assistance of a CSPR Triage Group, before making recommendations to the HSCP Strategic Group. Learning briefings have been completed and disseminated across the partnership with the support of the single points of contact (SPOCS) and the Business Unit.
- ✓ Sought assurance that groups working alongside the QIG have a function and clear points of reference.
- ✓ Facilitated three learning circles, one local reflective review and one rapid review, before submitting findings reports with recommendations to the HSCP Strategic Leadership Group for ratification.
- ✓ The QIG has supported initiatives including the adoption of more robust and transparent Professional Challenge and Escalation protocols to improve partnership working.
- ✓ Overseen the writing of a new Halton Neglect Strategy and the associated Neglect Assessment Framework and Practice Standards and Guidance.
- ✓ Facilitated an overhaul of the HSCP Training Offer with the creation of a digital suite of resources across numerous themes, produced by multi-agency partners for dissemination by single agencies.
- ✓ Revised the Practice Standards and Guidance for Strategy Meetings/Discussions and embedded changes through the multi-agency auditing process.
- ✓ Conducted an analysis of multi-agency provision in respect of supporting children as victims of domestic abuse, identifying areas where future focus is needed.
- ✓ Overseen the consolidation of Trauma Informed practice to compliment trauma awareness, for example with the creation of a trauma informed checklist to help agencies ensure their working environments are more trauma informed.
- ✓ Ensured single agency auditing findings are shared across the Partnership where applicable, boosting information sharing and inter-agency expertise.
- ✓ Identified areas of safeguarding provision that need enhancing, e.g. Child Sexual Abuse and collaborated with regional partners to adopt a north-west strategy that underpins the pathways espoused by the Centre for Expertise.



What difference has this made?

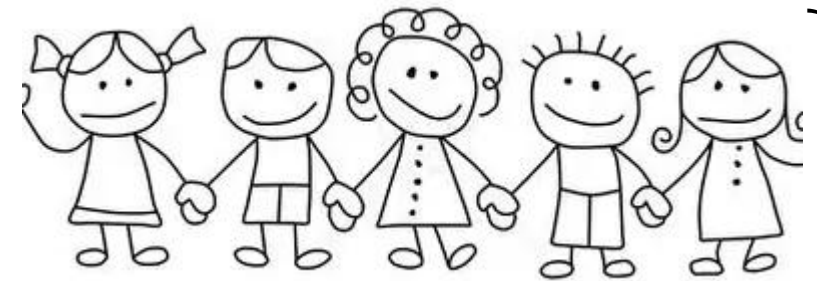
- ❖ The QIG have supported the Safeguarding Children Partnership in having a clear model to identify potential gaps in safeguarding provision, devise recommendations, and then share and communicate learning and new practices across the partnership.

- ❖ The QIG has developed a structured, and active learning approach, making links with a range of activity across the subgroups whilst simultaneously supporting the SCP's 3 key priorities in its Business Plan.
- ❖ The QIG now provides assurance to the HSCP that learning from local cases, Pan Cheshire themes, national practice reviews and the views of practitioners, children, and their families is factored into decision making and future planning.
- ❖ Analysis of quarterly CSPR reviews in 2024/25 consistently show that the vast majority of recommendations are being acted upon by HSCP, meaning safeguarding provision is increasingly robust.
- ❖ Practitioners report the new neglect screening tools being far more informative and useful in helping to improve conditions in the home.

Next steps:

- Make sure the key recommendations from QA activities that are upheld by strategic leaders, and the Executive are embedded, re-visited, and refined where necessary to ensure a partnership we are better at 'closing the loop.'
- Embed the new Quality Assurance Framework across the partnership, identifying more positive practice examples and sharing this wider.
- Ensure scrutiny of the HSCP dataset is decisive and effective in identifying gaps in provision and providing clearer evidence of progress against key objectives.
- Ensure the voice of children and families is consistently heard throughout all quality assurance activity.
- Introduce Quarterly Quality Assurance Newsletters to evidence how organisations are fulfilling HSCP priorities, including our cross-cutting themes, i.e. trauma informed approach, participation.
- Ensure S11 audit submissions are interrogated in future as part of a Pan Cheshire peer scrutiny approach.

The Contextual Safeguarding Sub-Group (CSSG): This group brings together senior officers from the three safeguarding partners and Education with responsibilities for child criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation and modern slavery. It is responsible for the development, implementation and oversight of the All-Age Exploitation Strategy and underpinning action plans and associated work streams.



Key achievements during 2024-2025:

- ✓ The initiation of weekly multi-agency contextual safeguarding meetings that allow partners to scrutinise medium and high-risk referrals in a timely fashion and ensure support pathways are introduced holistically with sound contributions from relevant organisations.
- ✓ The Contextual Safeguarding Operational Group (CSOG) now meets monthly and focuses on emerging themes and trends before disseminating this intelligence across the partnerships via monthly reporting. Each month key themes and the actions being undertaken in response to these themes are documented and shared for scrutiny by strategic leaders, CSSG and Improvement Board members.

- ✓ A CSA strategy was written that included the launch of the ERASE tool. Practitioners received both digital and face to face training on the application of ERASE and the wider direction of the strategy.
- ✓ Missing from Home Protocols have been enhanced with the implementation of Operation Philomena. This has helped ensure children and young people are quickly located and returned to their care settings.
- ✓ Monthly Halton Operational Missing from Home meetings were introduced, and these are having a clear impact on the numbers of children going missing. Missing from Home Masterclasses were launched with high levels of attendance, especially from CSC and schools.
- ✓ Operation Yellow Darting has been launched to help address the spiralling threat posed to our young people by ketamine. This has culminated in a series of arrests, thereby disrupting distribution.
- ✓ The CSSG has helped to co-ordinate awareness raising events in respect of ketamine, including the publication of pamphlets, banners, and posters. These have been accessed by nearly 300 front line practitioners and managers.

What difference has this made?

- ❖ We now have detailed information about missing children, including personal details, vulnerabilities, and frequented locations, to aid in their swift recovery as a result of Operation Philomena.
- ❖ The percentage of return home interviews has improved from 36% in April 2024 to 86% in March 2025.
- ❖ The number of total missing episodes has fallen during the reporting period from 96 per month to 36 per month.
- ❖ There has been continued improvement in levels of children and young people's engagement. All repeat young people engaged with a return to home interview in the final 6 months of this reporting period. Moreover, there has been a significant decrease in declined incidents over the year.
- ❖ Themes and trends have been identified quickly, e.g. the burgeoning problems with ketamine has seen work streams quickly directed towards addressing this drug trend.
- ❖ Professionals feel more confident in discussing ketamine use with young people. They have a better understanding of ketamine, how it is used and how readily available it is in Halton. Moreover, they have a better knowledge of the symptoms to recognise and the knowledge to help parents and colleagues. They understand what resources and support services in respect of ketamine are available in the region and feel more adept at supporting with assessments and supervision and utilising the referral process for supporting children and families.
- ❖ Medium risk referrals are scrutinised on a weekly basis, whereas previously capacity was compromised with only high-risk referrals being routinely assessed.

Next steps:

- A robust Multiagency Child Exploitation Sexual Abuse Pathway must be implemented to ensure that children and young people who have experienced sexual abuse are referred appropriately, and in a timely way, for medical treatment and ongoing support.



- Continued work to minimise declines & ensure robust attempts to offer Return Home Interviews as standard practice.
- Continued focus on tackling ketamine with focused school-based initiatives complimenting parent and carer awareness raising sessions.
- Continued promotion of the Vulnerability Hub and use of the appropriate screening tools.
- Ensure there is a co-ordinated response in tackling all-age exploitation with strong connections between Adults, Children, and the Safer Halton Partnership.

The Education Subgroup: This group ensures that all children and young people within any educational provision, including universal childcare, remain safe. The group engages with providers' designated safeguarding leads and supports them in embedding effective practice whilst reporting on emerging themes and trends within all education provisions.

Key achievements during 2024-2025:

- ✓ Raised awareness of Operation Encompass, specifically the levels of information that Police can share whilst addressing the timeliness of Police's communication with educational settings.
- ✓ Creation of a Vulnerable Learners Board: This Board provides governance and accountability function to oversee, guide and enhance Halton's partnership working to improve the educational outcomes of vulnerable learners. Vulnerable learners include: all children with a social worker; children at risk of NEET; children who are not receiving full-time education in a school setting appropriate to their needs; children open to the Youth Justice Service; children who have EAL/refugees/asylum seekers/GRT; those who have been permanently excluded.
- ✓ Ketamine awareness sessions have helped ensure school staff are better equipped to support young people and signpost them to the right services in a timely manner.
- ✓ Over 95% of schools completed the S175 audit. This helped the Partnership to identify where further support was needed and where protocols need to be reviewed. This is currently being done in respect of referrals to front door.
- ✓ Professional Challenge and Escalation has been elevated with training sessions ensuring school staff understand the Pan Cheshire protocols and are confident in using them.
- ✓ Several training sessions focusing on Multi-Agency Plans (MAPS) have resulted in schools becoming more confident at leading on a MAP when they are the most pivotal organisation in respect of the plan.
- ✓ Private Fostering training sessions have ensured schools are cognisant around Private Fostering and they are rigorously checking for such arrangements at different intervals throughout the academic year. A poster campaign has been launched in respect of what private fostering means for parents/carers and children and professionals. The Pan Cheshire Partnerships have come together to create a training package for organisations to utilise to ensure there is a shared awareness and understanding of policy and procedures.
- ✓ Trauma Informed Practice has been enhanced with schools investing in Thrive. Currently, more than 81% of Halton schools are now using the Thrive approach.

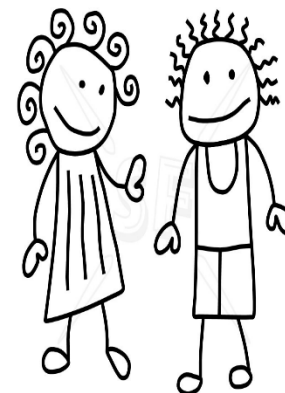
- ✓ The Education Subgroup completed an analysis of how well it is meeting the requirements of Working Together 2023, with the support of a DfE advisor. Moreover, the group was also scrutinised by the Independent Scrutineer. Both reviews were overwhelmingly positive on the role Education is playing in respect of safeguarding arrangements in Halton.

What difference has this made?

- ❖ There has been an increase in MAPS led by primary schools. In 2023/24 there were only 5% of primary schools leading on MAPS but by 2025 this figure has moved to 13% meaning there is a more equitable division of lead responsibilities with less onus on Children Social Care. This has alleviated some of the capacity issues previously experienced by CSC.
- ❖ There has been a slight increase in Private Fostering arrangements meaning young people's circumstances are being identified quicker and the right services made available far earlier than previously seen.
- ❖ The Attendance figures for Children in Care and Children in Care with an Educational Health Care Plan show increases for Academic Year 2024/25 compared to 2023/2024. For Children in Care, March 2025 was 92%, compared to March 2024 at 87.2% and for Children in Care with an EHCP, March 2025 was 91.5%, compared to 79.2% in March 2024. The highest percentage attendance for Children in Care is at our Primary Schools where attendance is now at 96.8%.
- ❖ The Thrive approach has contributed to a smaller percentage of primary school children missing school. The figures for 2025 show that overall absence in primary schools is 5.9% compared to 6.5% in 2023.
- ❖ Schools are now escalating in accordance with the Pan Cheshire Professional Challenge and Escalation procedures. There has been an increase in escalations at step 3 from 0 to 5 as schools are now aware they have recourse when there is professional discord.
- ❖ Data from the last academic year showed a reduction in suspensions for year 7 students, there was a reduction of suspension days from 168 in 23/24 to 67 in 24/25.
- ❖ The Attendance figures for Children in Care and Children in Care with an Educational Health Care Plan show increases for Academic Year 2024/25 compared to 2023/2024. For Children in Care, March 2025 was 92%, compared to March 2024 at 87.2% and for Children in Care with an EHCP, March 2025 was 91.5%, compared to 79.2% in March 2024.

Next steps:

- To ensure schools consistently receive timely support from front door services to help guide school staff decision making.
- To consolidate all the above in respect of Professional Challenge and Escalation, Private Fostering, trauma informed practice and schools leading on MAPS.
- To oversee a review of Operation Encompass to identify how effectively information is shared between Police, Early Years settings and schools.
- To enhance transition arrangements to ensure key transition points are seamless and effective, involving the voice of children at every opportunity.
- To ensure scrutiny of MAPS led by non-CSC is regularly reviewed by all sub-groups.



Health Operational Sub-Group: This sub-group provides a forum to ensure that providers and commissioners of healthcare in Halton work together in a coordinated and coherent manner to monitor and provide assurance to the Partnership on the safeguarding arrangements in place across the health economy. The arrangements are also used to cascade messages to the frontline and receive feedback on activity and approaches.

Key achievements during 2024-2025:

- ✓ Creation of a delivery plan to document how the health economy can support the HSCP Business Plan priorities.
- ✓ Helped in the creation of digital resources to share across the partnership that clarify best practice in s47, including child medicals.
- ✓ Brought together adult safeguarding board to ensure shared issues are tackled collegiately, as exemplified by the combined work on addressing ketamine use in our region by young people and adults.
- ✓ Raised the profile of support for children without a formal diagnosis but whose schooling is compromised by their physiology.
- ✓ Supported the continued focus on embedding a trauma informed approach across the health economy. This included Merseycare presenting multi-agency training sessions to help strengthen awareness.
- ✓ Developed a data set with the support of Merseycare to report on key performance indicators.
- ✓ Gained clarification around the referral process into ICART to address confusion between organisations and referrals being declined.

What difference has this made?

- ❖ At the end of March 2025 83% of our CIC had been recorded on Eclipse as having a Health Check, compared to 80% in March 2024. Currently work is progressing on the 903 (Children Looked After) Annual Census return and the Health figure is currently at 97%. We are now in receipt of up-to-date information on a regular basis from Bridgewater for those children who are placed out of borough.
- ❖ Current open CIC who have been looked after for at least 12 months should have had a dental check in the last 12 months. For March 2025 83% of that cohort have had a Dental Check recorded on Eclipse, compared to only 69% in March 2024.
- ❖ There has been a significant improvement in respect of referrals into ICART. Previously, Health providers were finding a large number were being returned because of insufficient information. However, this has now been resolved, and informative, comprehensive referrals are being processed in a timely manner.
- ❖ The number of children being awarded an EHCP has increased dramatically from 904 to 1524 between 2024-2025 (1319 in 2023).

Next steps:

- Enhance the available support to parents with learning difficulties and disabilities which as a consequence compromise their parenting capacity.
- Consolidate the work done in creating a co-ordinated approach that supports and caters for the needs of both adults and children.
- Consolidate the work done to accelerate support for children who do not have a formal diagnosis but whose behaviours are compromising their ability to achieve their full potential in school.
- Continue to address waiting times for CAMHS and key health check appointments.

Young People's Voice and Influence Group: The purpose of the group is to involve the young people of Halton in initiatives and developments relating to safeguarding across our region. The vision is to ensure that local communities, faith and voluntary sector organisations and statutory services work together to plan, design, develop, deliver, and evaluate safeguarding initiatives and strategies with young people's views and opinions integral to the process.

Key achievements during 2024-2025:

- ✓ Launched the Young People's Voice and Influence Group to help partners listen to and act upon the views of children who use our services, involving them wherever possible in setting priorities, planning, developing, and improving policy and training.
- ✓ Completed a baseline diagnostic assessment on how attuned partner organisations are in the Lundy Model.
- ✓ Completed a Train the Trainer programme to ensure partner organisations have at least one practitioner trained in disseminating the principles of the Lundy Model.
- ✓ Young Person's Panel established to explore barriers to engagement within Early Help.
- ✓ Direct work sessions were created and videoed by young people, and these are now shared with family support workers so they can see how children prefer such visits to be conducted.
- ✓ Re-wrote neglect screening tools so there is now a section for children to record their views on home life and their home environment.
- ✓ Worked with the other forums for young people across Halton to deliver agreed priorities.
- ✓ Shared examples of good practice between partner agencies and across Halton of engagement with young people.
- ✓ Expanded opportunities for children and young people to have a say about the nature and delivery of services to themselves and their peers.
- ✓ Ensured that structures are in place to embed best practice relating to engagement and participation in all the HSCP's work.
- ✓ Provided a framework for organisations to effectively involve children and young people in the development, delivery and evaluation of services that affect their lives.

What difference has this made?

- ❖ Young people report their Early Help visits are now taking place at times that they like, rather than being withdrawn from lessons. Some visits are taking place in the community rather than always in school time.
- ❖ Wishes and Feelings template are now said to be more child friendly and not 'dull, repetitive, forms.'
- ❖ Children report that direct work sessions are now more purposeful with themes relevant to them being explored, including anxiety and relationship building.

Next steps:

- To further develop an organisational culture of valuing children and young people's views and being proactive in facilitating their participation.
- To grow the number of children in our services who report that they have had opportunities to participate in decisions about their own lives and that they are satisfied with the process and the effect of their participation.
- To promote a joined-up approach to participation between all partner organisations.
- To ensure practitioners to develop and embed participation in their service area, department, or organisation.

3.7 Wider Safeguarding Arrangements

The HSCP does not operate in isolation, and there are a range of other multi agency partnership arrangements, which contribute significantly to the children's safeguarding agenda. We are members of the Pan Cheshire Policies and Procedures Group. This ensures we are up to date with the most recent changes as well as ensuring we work as effectively as possible with our cross-border partnerships. We recognise that many of our partners work across several local authority areas and therefore consistency in our safeguarding approach is paramount.

During this reporting period, progress was made in relation to several areas, including the creation of new strategies or revisions to existing practice for the following:

- The Pan Cheshire All Age Exploitation Strategy
- Was Not Brought Practice Guidance
- The PAN Cheshire Escalation policy
- FGM Guidance
- Safe Sleep
- Pre-Birth Guidance
- Rapid Review Referral Process
- Bruising in Children who are not independently mobile.
- Erase Tool

However, the HSCP recognises that there is more work to be done to strengthen its links with the other local boards and partnerships as we share many common themes, such as serious violence, domestic abuse, and exploitation. There are clear benefits to children, young people, families, and vulnerable adults coordinating specific areas of business across different partnerships. This is therefore one of the cross-cutting themes strategic leaders have identified as a key area for focus in 2025/26 and beyond.



4. Budget and Resources

4.1 Budget and Resources

Each of the local safeguarding partners contributes to the HSCP budget as well as offering their time and expertise to the activities of the partnership. These activities include participating in meetings, multi-agency audits and local reflective reviews, delivering training and ensuring the roll out of key learning and messages. The commitment, contribution, and engagement of partners in supporting child safeguarding in Halton is acknowledged and valued.

Income source 2024/25	Amount	Comment
Carry forward from 2023/24	£100,320	Underspend from previous year/s
Income Contributions 2024/25		
Halton Borough Council	£45,140	
Cheshire & Merseyside Integrated Care Board	£59,730	
Cheshire Police	£27,825	
Training & Inter-Authority Income	£4,110	
Education	£37,640	
Cheshire Probation Service	£2,020	
Grant funding (PCC re Ketamine)	£4800	
Total	£181, 265	

4.2 Changes to the funding arrangements:

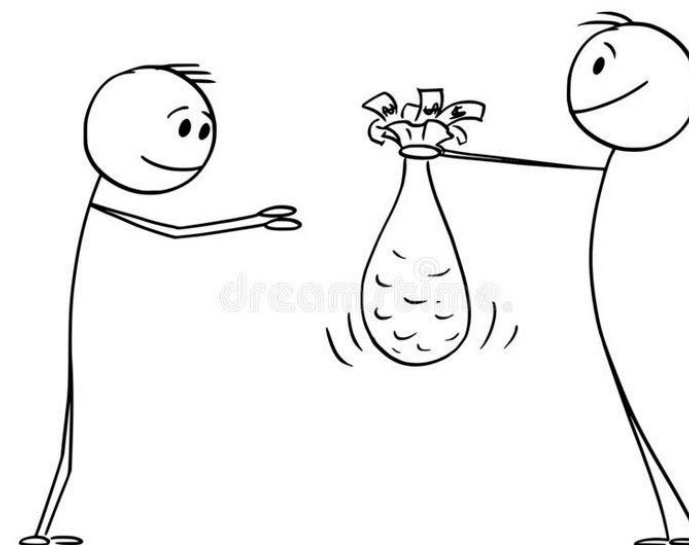
Income contributions from the core partners increased in 2024/25 by 5%, compared to a 6% increase that was enjoyed in 2023/24. Income received in respect of training was in line with previous years. The carry forward at the end of 2023/24 was much higher than previous years at £100,320. This was due to some staffing shortages, grant funding and expenditure that was committed in 2023/24 but not debited from accounts until 2024/25.

Expenditure for 2024/25 increased significantly from £178,636 to £214,412. This increase was largely accounted for by the employment of an Independent Scrutineer, the commissioning of a Young People's Plan, an increase in admin hours for the Business Unit and inflationary increases. Given that expenditure exceeded income for 2024/25, the HSCP used some of its reserves that were carried over from 2023/24.

4.3 An assessment of the impact and value for money of the funding received by safeguarding partnerships

Significant expenditure in the period was directed towards the following:

- ✓ The creation and continued hosting of a new HSCP web site
- ✓ A new online course booking facility and the associated costs of users booking onto HSCP training events
- ✓ The employment of an Independent Scrutineer
- ✓ An increase in face-to-face training events and with it a large increase in the hire of venues
- ✓ The continued appointment of a 0.8 Senior Administrator (the role was previously 0.5)
- ✓ An online system for facilitating statutory audits (s11 and s175).
- ✓ The commissioning of a Young People's Plan for Halton.



Expenditure 2023/24	Year End Spend	Comment
Salaries	£157,611	Business Manager/Training & Development Officer/Senior Administrator (0.8)/Head of Safeguarding (0.2)
Consultancy	£14,395	
Learning and Improvement	£13,175	
Learning and Improvement Project	£4,901	
Project Support	£10,687	
Training	£5,300	
Room Hire & Hospitality	£4,175	
Computer Equipment	£115	
Miscellaneous	£4,035	
Total	£214,412	

What has been the impact of the funding?

- ✓ New HSCP web site has resulted in a near doubling of visits to the site.
- ✓ Attendance at multi-agency training has shown a dramatic improvement for this reporting period. This has largely culminated from the reduction in professionals failing to attend a training event onto which they were booked. In the period April-September 2024, **936** multi-agency partners booked onto training events but only **543** attended the event (**393** no shows). This equated to an attendance record of only **58%**. However, in the period October 2024-March 2025, the attendance percentage improved to **87%** with **708** professionals attending the training events they booked onto (only **107** no shows).
- ✓ Statutory compliance re WT23 has been assured as the independent scrutineer provided useful guidance in helping the HSCP implement Working Together 2023.
- ✓ Central to the work of different partnerships and boards across Halton is our Young People's Plan. This ensures our key priorities are everyone's business and reviewed at regular intervals. It also brings together the work of different partnerships and boards across Halton and ensures a joined-up approach to tackling the priority areas articulated in the Young People's Plan.
- ✓ Audit completion rates are over 95%. Agencies' feedback is they find the online portal that is now in operation easy to navigate and purposeful. Moreover, audit findings have helped identify areas where partners need to enhance practice to ensure safeguarding procedures are more robust.
- ✓ By employing our own Senior Administrator, the HSCP has been able to ensure subgroup meetings take place in line with their terms of reference and that attendance is consistently high. All supporting documents and agendas are now distributed in a timely manner and actions implemented more

consistently. As a consequence, the number of subgroup meetings increased within a two-year period from 22 meetings in 2022/2023 to 56 meetings in 2024/25. Furthermore, Learning Improvement Trackers, Risk Registers, Policy Trackers and Action logs are all maintained with aplomb.

5. Progress against our Priorities

Priority work areas have their own dedicated section on each sub-group's delivery plan and progress is reported as part of a standard agenda item at all Safeguarding Children Partnership meetings. An overview of this progress is captured in Chair's reports that in turn are shared with strategic leads for the wider partnership and the Executive. This ensures work is progressed and subgroups are held to account.

5.1 Priority 1: Improving the quality and timeliness of our practice in relation to neglect.

Why we chose this.

Neglect has been a priority for the Safeguarding Partnership for several years and we know we need to do more so that children have their needs met by their parents or carers, and support is provided where this is not the case. Neglect is the most frequent reason for referrals to the Integrated Front Door. Furthermore, we recognise the distinctions and commonalities between poverty and neglect and that both are major adverse childhood experiences in young people's lives that can affect their futures.

What did we do in 2024/25?

- Hosted a multi-agency training day centred on 'Understanding Neglect and Local Procedures'
- Facilitated an awareness raising session exploring Neglect and Poverty in Halton, with contributions from Local Hubs team, Educational Psychology and Police.
- Hosted two Educational neglect trainings, delivered by the HBC Education Team.
- Cheshire Police have adopted the AWARE framework underpinned by an ACEs, trauma informed approach. AWARE includes a tool for front line officers to support them in being professionally curious in their interactions with children and families where they have concerns regarding neglect.
- Reviewed the HSCP Neglect Strategy and the related toolkits and assessment framework.
- Ensured the voice of Halton's children was acted upon in creating a new Home Conditions Tool and screening tool with places for children's views to be documented.

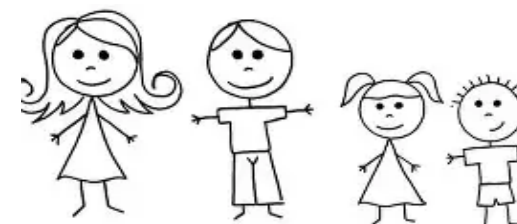
- Continued to expand the Family Hubs offer across Halton. The aim of Family Hubs is to provide families with multi-agency support to care for their children from conception, throughout the early years, and into the start of adulthood. Through joining up and enhancing services, all parents and carers can access the support they need when they need it.
- Conducted a Local Learning Review following a case for consideration with a theme of neglect.
- Produced 7-minute briefings disseminated to help raise awareness of practice and procedures.
- Strengthened the work of the Vulnerable Learners Board with a specific focus on Educational Neglect.
- Ensured numerous Partnership Briefings were disseminated along this key theme.

What was the impact for children and young people?

- ❖ Since launching the neglect strategy in 2022 the numbers of neglect as the presenting issue for Level 2 Early Help contacts has seen a downward trend. From 148 in 2022/23 the figure fell to 57 in 2023/24 and again to 31 in 2024/25.
- ❖ Practitioners are confirming an increase in confidence in identifying and evidencing neglect via pre- and post-course questionnaires.
- ❖ Actions undertaken by the Vulnerable Learners Board have ensure there is a comprehensive dataset that closely tracks children with additional vulnerabilities. This close support and oversight of children not regularly attending school has helped result in a lower percentage of pupils not attending school in Halton. For example, the percentage of children who are persistently absent from their primary school was 14.6 in March 2025 compared to 20.2 in 2022 and 16.4 in 2023.
- ❖ Family Hubs now provide a place where children, young people and their families can go when they need support. They provide an effective offer of early help enabling families to receive the right service at the right time. Indeed, Family Hubs are supporting families in achieving the best start in life for their babies. Support available from conception includes parenting support, infant feeding, parent infant relationships, education, and peri-natal mental health.
- ❖ Practitioners across Halton are delivering effective interventions to address the impact of neglect on children and young people. These interventions are varied and include support to both children and parents. In addition, multi-agency audit findings showed there is timely recognition and response to neglect. However, the support given to children and parents is largely reactive to family circumstances, rather than initiative-taking.
- ❖ Family friendly language is being consistently used in published materials.

Where do we need to do to make more progress in the future?

- Neglect continues to be a key challenge in Halton as the number of children requiring a child protection plan because of neglect has increased from 63% to 73% between April 2024 to April 2025.
- Recognise that there is often a strong correlation between poverty and neglect and therefore instigate more initiative-taking measures to address poverty, so instances of neglect are reduced.



- Scrutinise and analyse the measures taken to address poverty to identify the impact these actions are having on neglect across Halton.
- Increase the use of the neglect screening and home conditions tools by partner agencies working with families.
- Circulate HSCP partnership briefings throughout 2025/26 focusing on neglect and poverty alongside the relevant learning from local reviews. Learning from Rapid Reviews should be used to promote and strengthen early identification of risks, including educational neglect.
- Refine neglect indicators in the HSCP data suite and embed systems across agencies for data retrieval, allowing for reporting on usage.
- Conduct a multi- agency audit to evidence journey travelled before sharing with key partners to bring about further change in recognising and responding to neglect.
- Ensure ongoing liaison and sharing of best practice with other Safeguarding Partnerships.
- Ensure the Continuum of Need is consistently applied across all partner organisations.
- To get better at measuring the impact of our work by enhancing our Neglect assurance & impact measuring tools.
- Hold face to face events, create online recorded video messages, produce Partnership briefings, and use the HSCP web site to help relaunch the Neglect Strategy.
- Ensure all practitioners are aware of the services available in our region to support families and young people.

5.2 Priority 2: Safeguarding Children from Violence and Exploitation

Why we chose this.

Child exploitation continues to be a priority for HSCP to identify and reduce the number of children affected by exploitation. The focus is to ensure that there is a good understanding across the partnership of the complex and interrelated risks associated with child exploitation to enable support and intervention to take place at the earliest opportunity. Furthermore, Child Exploitation (CE) is increasingly being recognised as a major factor behind crime in communities in the UK; it also victimises vulnerable young people and leaves them at risk of harm.

What did we do?

- Created new weekly multi-agency contextual safeguarding subgroup meetings to ensure medium and high-risk referrals are scrutinised by all partners in a robust and timely manner.
- Revised the Contextual Safeguarding Operational Group (CSOG) so multi-agency partners now focus their monthly meeting around concerning themes and trends, before disseminating this intelligence across the SCP.
- Audited the efficacy of multi-agency strategy discussions and meetings to ensure consistent application of timescales and understanding on how such meetings are convened. Updated the Practice Standards and Guidance in relation to Strategy meetings and discussions. Produced monthly reports to

document the attendance and timeliness of strategy meetings. Held Partnership Briefings event to ensure partners fully understood their commitment to strategy meetings.

- Produced a multi-agency SWAY focusing on s47 before hosting an event for Police, Health, and CSC to share the hallmarks of how s47 enquiries should be conducted.
- Held two multi-agency awareness raising events centred on the increasing risks posed by ketamine. These events included the distribution of ketamine posters/z cards/banners to help raise the profile. Also, several organisations who support users presented at the events to ensure professionals have a clear understanding of referral pathways and potential sources of support to young people and families.
- Created a new CSSG Delivery Plan to compliment the Pan Cheshire All Age Exploitation Plan to make sure priorities and related actions are relevant to Halton. Targeted progress in four key areas: Early Identification; Proving High Quality Support; Stopping Perpetrators; Reducing Social and Cultural Barriers, alongside the 3 priorities in the HSCP Business Plan.
- Collected data and intelligence from multiple organisations (police, hospital attendances, Education, CSC) which is now scrutinised on a quarterly basis by CSSG for data trends in respect of serious violence and exploitation.
- Ensured the Vulnerable Learners Board meet bimonthly to provide rigorous oversight of the most vulnerable young people in Halton. Thus, there are greater links with the education sector, as it is accepted that excluding children at risk of exploitation increases the risk.
- During 2024/25, the HSCSP launched its new digital learning resource, accessible via its web site. The training includes content in relation to strategy meetings and section 47 enquiries and ketamine.
- Reviewed the Pan Cheshire Missing from Home protocols with input from commissioned provider, We are With You (WAWY). Produced quarterly reports that document trends in respect of children missing, return home interviews and repeat missing episodes.
- Operation Philomena launched by Cheshire Police to help provide a quicker response to situations where a young person goes missing.
- Created a new CSA strategy for Halton, based on the recommendations of the Centre for Expertise. Circulated partnership briefings in relation to CSA and facilitated a CSA conference that included speakers with lived experiences. Furthermore, the new ERASE tool was launched to support practitioners in identifying and supporting the victims of CSA.
- During 2024/25, the partnership has worked to strengthen co-location of services wherever possible in order to improve communication and partnership working. The co-location of police officers within ICART is an example of this and has been supporting the identification of children at risk of exploitation.
- Formation of Early Help Strategic Board.
- Ensured serious violence and exploitation is now included as an issue for other partnerships, including the Safer Halton Community Partnership, to ensure these priority areas are addressed collegiately.
- Hosted a conference 'Lads Like Us' to help professionals gain a better understanding of real-life experiences of exploitation and how to support young people with a more trauma informed approach.
- Created a trauma informed checklist to help partner organisations get a clearer understanding of how to create a working environment that compliments the trauma informed approach.

What was the impact for children and young people?

- ❖ Thresholds and Level of Need indicators are clearly defined and assist practitioners in having a shared understanding of the whole needs/risk of a child/ young person.
- ❖ Risks to children in care related to exploitation and being missing from home are quickly recognised, enhanced by the launch of Operation Philomena. Accurate and timely risk assessments lead to effective intervention and support, as evidenced by WAWY quarterly reports.
- ❖ Practitioners when trying to identify the correct level of need consistently seek advice and guidance from their line manager, and/or agency designated safeguarding lead.
- ❖ Effective signposting to appropriate services and advice means children and their families consistently access timely support.
- ❖ Practitioners in Halton feel supported through training and supervision to understand their role in identifying new and emerging threats, including online abuse, grooming, sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, and radicalisation.
- ❖ Fewer children are persistently absent from school and by implication at risk of exploitation.
- ❖ S11 audit returns indicates over 90% of respondents are confident their agencies' workforce can recognise signs of exploitation in children / young people and take appropriate action.

Where do we need to do to make more progress in the future?

- Further review of referral, assessment, and intervention processes, in particular the role of the integrated front door, referral partners and assessment team.
- Targeted communications activity to raise awareness of exploitation across the partnership and the public.
- Ensure data underpins both the operational and strategic work of the SCP and is used effectively as a preventative and protection mechanism.
- Gather more feedback from young peoples' experiences of exploitation and use this to shape the complex safeguarding strategy and delivery plan. Create coherent lines of communication with children and young people in conjunction with the feedback they give in the focus groups, so they are kept informed via-a-vis the opinions they express.
- Continue to promote the use of the Operation Philomena Protocol for missing children and young people in care. Complete additional work around the Philomena protocol to ensure meaningful contact when children go missing. Ensure such work is undertaken around children who are not looked after but regularly go missing.
- Dip sample and deep dive audits to address how effectively toolkits and procedures/protocols are being followed.
- Ensure all the actions from 2024/25 are consolidated so they become genuinely embedded in daily practice.
- Update the training offer for partner organisations in relation to exploitation and contextualized safeguarding. Training offer to be rolled out to partner agencies in relation to the new Pan Cheshire All Age Exploitation Strategy to enable key agencies to review and monitor CE risk levels.

5.3 Priority 3: Protecting Children as victims of Domestic Abuse

Why we chose this.

According to Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) from the Office for National Statistics 2024, approximately 1 in 20 people experienced domestic abuse in the Year ending March 2024 and approximately 2.3 million people aged 16 and over experienced Domestic abuse (1,612,000 females and 712,000 males). Furthermore, the National Panel recorded 50% of serious harm or child deaths in rapid reviews occurred in households where domestic abuse was present. It is a source of anxiety and poor mental health amongst school age children and can have life-long impact in terms of healthy relationships. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 identified children as victims if they see, hear or experience the effects of domestic abuse. Finally, an Ofsted inspection in May 2024 reported that: 'Too many children live in harmful circumstances for too long before assertive action is taken, particularly when domestic abuse or neglect is a feature.'



What did we do?

- During this reporting period, we conducted Ofsted's JTAI benchmarking of how local safeguarding partners work together to help and protect children who are victims of domestic abuse. The exercise helped form some key recommendations, all of which were upheld by the Halton Domestic Abuse Board for implementation.
- A key finding from the JTAI benchmarking exercise was a need to improve the support available to perpetrators of domestic abuse. Hence, the Choices programme has been launched to support the perpetrators of domestic abuse. CHOICES explores topics including: The impact of domestic abuse on partners & children, healthy relationships, accountability, self-esteem & resilience, risk assessment & safety planning, triggers, positive parenting, and mental health. It aims to reduce instances of abuse and violence and improve understanding of individuals behaviour. The importance of working collaboratively and all for agencies to understand the Choices program is crucial to its success.
- We have established a pilot project called '**Breaking the Cycle of Domestic Abuse in Halton**' which looks to develop a multi-disciplinary support service that will implement a contextual safeguarding approach to address Domestic Abuse. This includes a behaviour change programme which provides immediate and longer-term support to both Perpetrators and victims of Domestic Abuse. Moreover, it ensures that the behaviour change programme is suitable for perpetrators at all risk levels and is able to offer support and actively engage the victim and whole family. Ultimately our goals are to reduce reoffending, make victims and children safer and support families to stay together, where appropriate.

- The Halton Domestic Abuse Partnership Strategy 2025/26 was written and launched at the end of this reporting period. In creating the strategy, we have listened to our local survivors, their children and working together have designed a clear pathway to the Partnership to ensure that we are and continue to be service user led. Halton has a long established strong multi agency partnership ethos, we recognise that no one agency can end domestic abuse, and we will continue to work in collaboration and challenge agencies to ensure that intervention models are based on best practise, evidence, and robust evaluation.
- As part of the **‘Breaking the Cycle of Domestic Abuse in Halton’** Project, Remedi, now deliver targeted preventative programmes to young people (10-17yrs old) affected by adverse childhood experiences, that may be at risk of becoming or are currently a perpetrator of Domestic Abuse against anyone they are personally connected to (intimate partners, ex-partners, family members or individuals who share parental responsibility for a child).
- A service mapping exercise was completed to identify the offer from agency and commissioned services to families, schools, and communities.
- Operation Encompass, led by Cheshire Police, has had a positive impact in schools. Police have raised awareness with the Designated Safeguarding Leads in schools as to the limitations surrounding the level of information they are able to share. Schools have equally been able to voice any concerns they have in relation to the timeliness of information sharing. Poster awareness campaigns have been promoted, and this will continue to be an area for further development in 2025/26.
- A digital resource has been created with multi-agency input, and this is accessible via the HSCP web site. The resource provides a snap guide to the Halton Domestic Abuse Offer and it maps Halton’s Domestic Abuse Response pathways. The resource also clarifies the role of the (Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor (IDVA) and some of the support they can offer. The resource explains the referral process and the support available to both the victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse.
- The IDVA Team are working closely with Police regarding Operation Jingles. The IDVA Team support high risk clients of which 85% are coming through on a 999 call when they are in crisis.
- Furthermore, a workstream is being compiled along with the Health Improvement Team to build links with the business community.
- We have progressed the White Ribbon Action Plan, predicated on the four key areas of Strategic Leadership, Engaging Men and Boys, Changing Culture and Raising Awareness.
- The IRIS programme has progressed well, with positive valuations throughout.
- Awareness raising activity has ensured professionals and community members are more aware of some of the local support services, including Refuge-SHAP, Women’s Centre, Castlefield’s, The Hope2Recovery program, the Authentic Voice Forum, and the Gateway program.
- We have continued to support and embed trauma informed working practice across partner agencies.

What was the impact for children and young people?

- ❖ Over the past 12 month we have noticed a decrease in repeat domestic abuse cases involving children that are being heard at MARAC (multi agency risk assessment conference) by 26%. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the work being offered to families with children impacted by DA at high-risk thresholds.
- ❖ Choices Programme – the service consistently supports 25 cases across a broad spectrum of ages, including children. This is a voluntary programme in which referrals are made from a wide range of Partners. The volume of people supported underlines how important the work is and the merit in it. Strong case studies are emerging and will be shared in 2025/26.
- ❖ Completion rates for the Choices program which works with perpetrators over a 26-week period have been extremely high at over 90%.

Where do we need to do to make more progress in the future?

- Identify available and relevant multiagency datasets and performance indicators to inform positive outcomes in respect of this theme.
- Ensure continued links between the work of the Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership, the Safer Halton Partnership, and the Halton Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to strengthen the response to children and young people who are affected by Domestic Abuse.
- Develop the Whole Housing approach to interface with our existing systems and pathways including Marac and the Integrated Front Door.
- Embed the learning within staff teams and across the partnership through models of joint working and shared learning events.
- Build the evidence base and financial case for the approach through high quality external evaluations that can be used to support future funding applications.
- Include performance measures that evidence sustained change.
- Create tools, materials and interventions that can be used by professionals, and families themselves.
- Audit Child Protection and Adults pathways to assure that adults safety plans link with child protection assessments and plans and vice versa.
- Implement and evaluate the HSCP Domestic Abuse training offer for 2025/26.
- Complete a full evaluation of Operation encompass and its effectiveness, linked to s175 audit.
- Ensure there is a reduction in waiting times for commissioned service, including perpetrator programmes.
- Review the efficacy of 'Breaking the Cycle of Domestic Abuse in Halton,' including the Choices program.



6. **Key Achievements and their impact 2024/25:**

ACHIEVEMENT	WHAT THIS MEANS
CSPR Triage Group	Learning recommendations from all CSPR are now scrutinised and gaps in current safeguarding provision identified. The CSPR Triage Group consistently make cogent observations before circulating these to relevant subgroups and partner agencies for actioning.
HSCP Digital Offer	Under the direction of the Executive, multi-agency partners have collaborated in the creation of digital learning resources that are now accessible from the HSCP web site. These digital resources enable organisations the opportunity to brief employees on a variety of safeguarding areas in a flexible and timely manner. These resources include themes such as strategy meetings and s47, domestic abuse and child exploitation.
Lundy Model	The HSCP embarked on its mission to embed the Lundy Model principles across multi-agency practice. This means we have started to improve the way we collect the opinions of children (voice), the places where such views are sourced (space), the people that listen to these opinions (audience) and the impact of such dialogue (impact). Work will continue throughout 2025/26 in embedding these principles with the continued support of 'Participation People'.
Introduction of the ERASE harmful sexual practice tool	Front line practitioners have started to become more adept at identifying and assessing children and young people who display sexually harmful behaviours and assessing levels of risk.
Educational Neglect Addendum 2024	There is now greater awareness of how low school attendance can be an indicator of neglect and how this needs to be addressed collegiately.
The Vulnerable Learners Board	There is now strong strategic oversight of our most vulnerable learners and a measured approach to proactively identify, support, and help to re-engage learners in a timely manner.

Independent Scrutiny	Our Independent Scrutineer was appointed in the final quarter of 2023/24 and therefore the role was firmly consolidated in 2024/25. The scrutineer helped ensure the SCP was compliant with Working Together 2023 as well as scrutinising the partnership's self-assessment of itself.
6 Steps Self-assessment	The HSCP now has a much better handle on its strengths and areas for development having completed a comprehensive review of its standing against the Bedfordshire University 6 Steps Model.
The HSCP web site.	The Partnership is now better at sharing resources, new course information, toolkits, findings from learning reviews, governance arrangements, latest news etc.
The HSCP data scorecard/storyboard.	Quarterly data drops by all key partners and story boards facilitate the identification of emerging risks, alongside qualitative feedback.
Strategy meetings/discussions	Procedures for all multi-agency strategy meetings and discussions have been enhanced with tighter timescales being applied and attendance consistently at 100% across the 4 core partners.
Halton Children & Young People's Plan	The HSCP now has an over-arching Plan that identifies its key priorities for all children in the region between 2024-27.
Subgroup Delivery Plans	All sub-groups now have delivery plans with clearly defined actions, in addition to robust reporting arrangements, ensuring the key priorities of the HSCP command the lion's share of subgroup activity, time and effort.
Halton Neglect Strategy	The Halton Neglect Strategy now has more meaningful toolkits, including sound assurance tools and more a robust Home Conditions Tool and screening tool to identify risk quicker.
Partnership Briefings	Safeguarding messages and course information has been shared widely across the partnership via 30+ partnership briefings that have been emailed to several hundred front line professionals and managers.

Local Reflective Review, Rapid Reviews and Learning Circles	The arrangements for conducting our 3 types of learning reviews were revised with the purpose, protocols, key features, and a rota for chairing such learning events established. Since their inception, six learning events have taken place (see section 8).
Development of Quality Assurance and Performance	The Quality Assurance Framework has been revised, and this includes a QA Plan on a Page where partners can view the QA activity on a one-year calendar. This has formalised the timing of multi-agency audits, single agency s11/s175 audits and CSPP triage events.
Ketamine Awareness Raising programme	Extensive activity has ensured front line practitioners and managers are far more aware of ketamine use in our region and the support available to help young people who use the drug. Police arrests have disrupted the supply of the drug through Operation Yellow Darting, and this targeted activity will continue throughout 2025/26.
CSOG and weekly multi-agency contextual safeguarding meetings	The start of weekly multi-agency contextual safeguarding sub-group meetings mean referrals are now scrutinised in a timelier manner and support instigated in a timelier manner. The revamp of CSOG also means that these monthly meetings focus purely on identifying themes and trends of concerns and planning multi-agency actions to mitigate these emerging patterns of concern.
Trauma Informed Practice	We have seen an increase in training opportunities, the creation of trauma informed checklists and the collection of good examples where a trauma informed approach has been evident. This drive towards a trauma informed approach will continue throughout 2025/26 and beyond.
Private Fostering	There is a stronger awareness across partner organisations of what constitutes private fostering and ways to detect this, particularly from a schooling perspective.
LMS Booking System	Professionals are now able to book onto training courses much easier via the HSCP web site before sharing course impact statements and collecting certificates. This has resulted in an increase in course attendance and far fewer no-shows.

Pan Cheshire Missing from Home	New protocols in place with Operation Philomena now evident meaning partners are better informed at finding children when they go missing and quickly ensuring they return to their care homes at the earliest opportunity.
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6.1 Key Challenges:

Multi-Agency Data	The HSCP has a dataset that encapsulates the key concerns that the three core partners and Education have and this scorecard is scrutinised on a quarterly basis. Accompanying this holistic scorecard is an accompanying scorecard that focuses more on the HSCP Business Plan priority areas. However, the collection of some of this data (particularly in relation to ketamine) has been difficult as some data is not available or it is dated. Furthermore, there needs to be more systematic analysis of the data provided.
Quality Assurance	The HSCP did not employ a Quality Assurance Officer in 2024/25 and as a result the measurement of impact has been harder to establish at times.
Transitional Safeguarding	Transition between children and adult services has been strengthened with representatives from both children and adult services attending Board meetings. Reports from both sectors are shared but there remains much work to do to ensure there is a seamless transition as young people become adults.
Voice of Children and Young People	Partner organisations are improving the way they gather the opinions from a cross-section of young people, however there is still a need to ensure such opinions are acted upon and have the degree of influence young people in Halton expect.
Embedding of Learning	Currently a lot of good work is done by the HSCP, but insufficient time and attention is directed to embedding learning and revisiting areas where gaps were previously identified. The Quality and Impact Group currently has a vast remit; therefore, it is proposed that a new Performance and Scrutiny Group is formed to ensure there is a more rigorous analysis of scorecards and data sets, with the Quality band Impact Group focusing more on learning and review.
Thresholds/Levels of Need	Scrutiny work tells us that threshold application is at times not consistent across agencies, resulting in inconsistent response to risk. This is documented on the HSCP Risk Register.

7. Engaging with Children and Families

The HSCP does not have a single mechanism, currently, for recording the voice of the child and capturing the opinions of families. Instead, the partnership seeks assurances from partners that children are at the heart of everything they do and that they actively engage with them. We have seen excellent examples of partnership engagement with young people and their families, and there is a page on the new HSCP web site that celebrates connection points.

In this reporting period, the HSCP asked partners to reflect on some of the most effective ways they work with children and families. Strong contributors included:

Family Hubs: Access to provisions and support for families to navigate information, advice, and guidance on each stage of parenthood.

Parenting and Healthy Relationships Team: Evidence-based programmes delivered to families by multiagency professionals from across the borough.

Warrington and Halton Youth Service: Personal Plans through activities/Co-produced clinic guides/focused time for listening and sharing views/ Opportunities to drive own healthcare.

Mersey Care - Engagement & Participation team: Language matters: words and triggers. Developing plans to approach language informed by discovery.

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Team: Fire Action Plans with families/ daily and weekly education programmes/post-incident engagement with children and families.

Family Nurse Partnership: New Mum Star – Assessment/Collaborative goal setting/Strengths based programme and resources informed by attachment, self-efficacy, and human ecology.

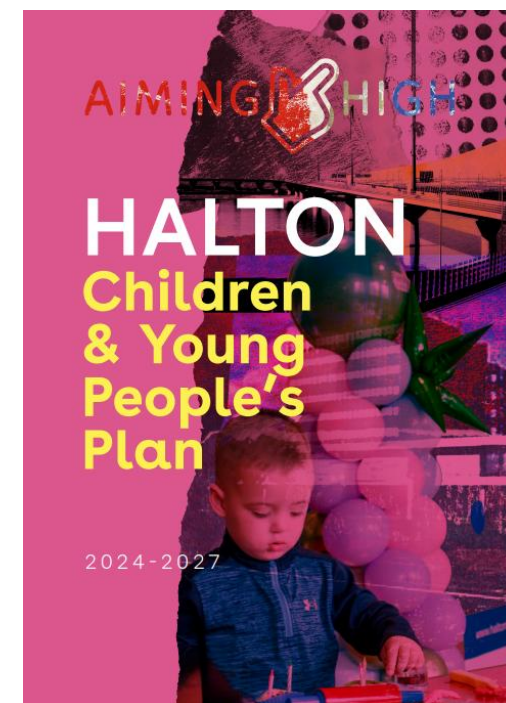
Children and Young people's Mental Health Services: Co-produced support, guidance, pathways, process, advice, and conversation.

(0-19) Services Mersey care Foundation Trust: Quality Improvement plans, and new processes and guidance informed by patient feedback, conversations and listening to the views of young people and families.

7.1 Children and Young People Plan 2024-2030

In 2024 the Partnership commissioned the creation of the **Halton Children and Young People Plan**. Central to the Plan are the following 3 questions we must ask:

- What is life like for this child or young person?
- What can I do to make it better?
- Would this be good enough for my child?

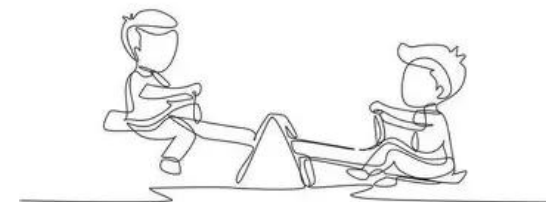


In writing this plan we have spoken to many: children, young people, professionals, carers, parents, leaders and politicians and there is one striking point upon which everyone agrees and that is:

‘HALTON’S CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & FAMILIES ARE OUR PRIDE & OUR FUTURE’

The 3 top priorities in the Plan are focused around:

- ❖ **Prevention and Early Intervention**
- ❖ **Increasing Education Attendance**
- ❖ **Improving Professional Practice**



This plan therefore aligns closely with the One Halton Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2027 and the HSCP Business Plan 2024-27.

7.2 Diagnostic Report on Participation in Halton

During 2024/25, the HSCP worked with **Participation People** in establishing how well the Lundy Model principles are embedded in partner practice. The diagnostic report captured Halton’s progress and potential in embedding participation across its Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA). The report draws on consultations with key stakeholders, reflective workshops, and region-wide training, offering a current picture of Halton’s participation landscape and practical recommendations for achieving excellence.

The analysis of Halton’s Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) underscores the importance of genuine, structured, and accountable youth participation. While established frameworks are in place, the report highlighted the need for greater inclusivity, diversity, and transparent decision-making processes. To bridge the gap between strategic intent and operational execution, we recognise that MASA partners must embed participation as a core principle, driven by robust accountability and continuous feedback.

Our **Expanded Roadmap to Success** provides a structured path forward, prioritising immediate improvements in accessibility and engagement, followed by the integration of digital methods, enhanced oversight, and systematic feedback loops. Over the long term, we recognise that Halton's MASA must institutionalise these improvements, ensuring that babies, children, young people, and families are not only heard but actively shape the safeguarding policies that impact their lives.

Achieving this vision will require commitment across all MASA partners, shared ownership of outcomes, and a collective drive towards safeguarding system where youth voice is central, impactful, and transformative.



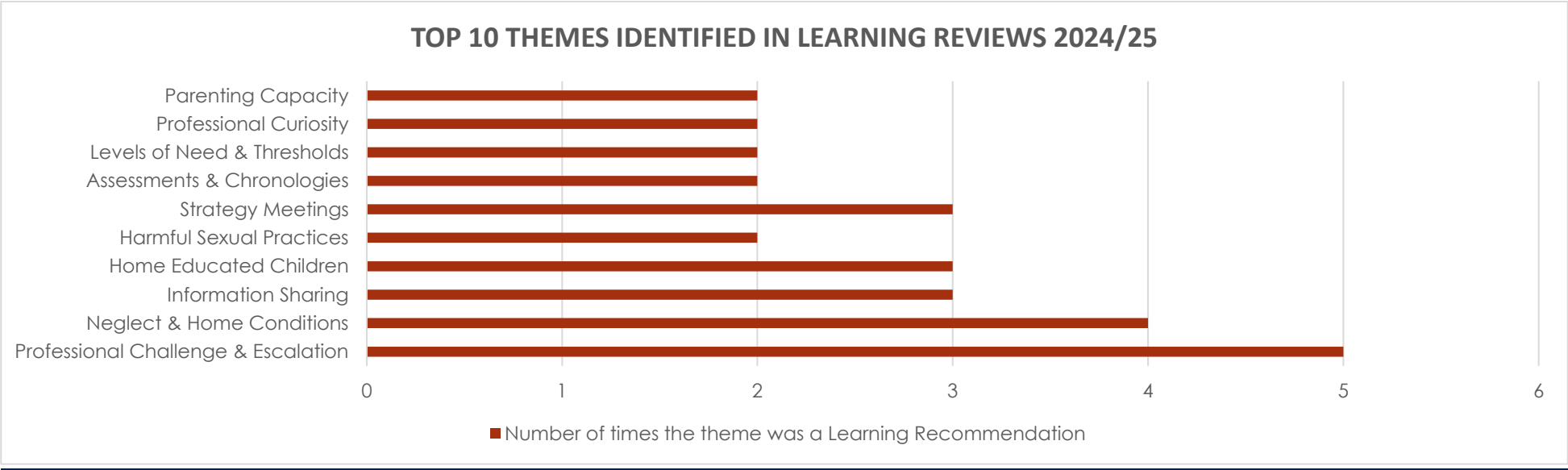
8. Learning from Case Reviews

There were no Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews in 2024/25 in Halton. However, during the reporting period the Safeguarding Children Partnership conducted 6 learning reviews:

- ✓ Learning Circle for Sibling Group L
- ✓ Learning Circle for Child M
- ✓ Rapid Review for Child N
- ✓ Learning Circle for Child O
- ✓ Thematic Audit for Sibling Group P
- ✓ Local Reflective Review for Sibling Group Q

8.1 Learning Reviews

The following chart shows the themes that were evident in more than one learning event in this reporting period. The themes that occurred most frequently centred on Professional Challenge and Escalation and Home Conditions (Neglect).



How to manage risk posed by sex offenders, domestic abuse and understanding the MAPPA process

Please come and join the special guest speaker, Detective Superintendent Carlos Brunes for this important 'How to...' lunchtime session where he will be looking at managing significant risk from a police perspective.

Ever wanted to know what 'MAPPA' is or does? Want to know more about how the police manage risk in domestic abuse cases and, how they work with risk posed by sex offenders?

DSU Brunes will be skilfully taking us through all these factors in a whistle stop lunchtime hour, giving you the key information you need to inform your expectations and practice when working alongside our colleagues in the police force.

24th October 2024
12:00-13:00

There is **NO NEED TO REPLY TO THIS INVITE**.

Simply join using the below invite

Microsoft Teams [Need help?](#)

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 367 748 660 763

Passcode: vEpoQt

****ERASE dates have been released****

Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB)

is developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour displayed by children & young people which is harmful or abusive on themselves, or another person.

St Helens developed a protocol (called ERASE), to help professionals identify these behaviours. It was created by a multi-agency task and finish group comprising of professionals from within the safeguarding partnership, which include the Safeguarding Children in Education Coordinator, Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children, Operational Manager for Youth Justice, Secondary School Designated Safeguarding Lead and the Learning and Improvement Officer. **This resource surrounds the evidence base outlined by Hackett.**

St Helens have offered this training and protocol to neighbouring authorities to use and Halton are delighted to announce the below dates that are available to book on to. The session will enable you to;

- To understand what Harmful Sexual Behaviour is
- To look at what makes sexual behaviour healthy or harmful
- To understand why children and young people display Harmful Sexual Behaviour
- How to identify and respond to Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Sessions are available to be booked now for;

24th October 2024

20th November 2024

19th December 2024

All are 09:30-16:00 @ Runcorn Town Hall

[Book your place now](#)

If you have not already registered on the above booking site. Please use the above link to do so, as it will provide you access to all the Multi-agency available for professionals in Halton

*** Special Event ***

A Focus on Child Sexual Abuse policy/tools/support & a survivor's story

Far more children are being sexually abused than are currently coming to the attention of professionals. A lot is known about child sexual abuse and progress has been made in addressing the needs of children and their families, but there remains many gaps in knowledge and understanding which limit how effectively this is tackled.



The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, has commissioned the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre) to lead on a review into Child Sexual Abuse Within the Family Environment. We expect the Review to be published this summer.

Halton are currently reviewing their Multi-agency CSA Strategy and & guidance & will be launching in this Special Event which will focus on;

- An update on the National Panel Review into child sexual abuse within the family environment.
- Halton's new Multi Agency Child Sexual Abuse Strategy & Guidance
- Halton case review—A professionals' experience
- Abuse of Position of Trust for a sexual Purpose - Cheshire Police presentation
- Introducing the CSA Response Pathway from the Centre of Expertise
- CSA – A survivors story
- An introduction to ERASE, a guidance for Harmful Sexual Behaviours.
- Agency representations.
- Mini intro workshops on ERASE, Communicating with Children Guide & the Signs & indicator template

Wednesday 25th September 2024

10:00-16:00 DCBL Stadium Halton WA8 7DZ

[Book your place now](#)

If you have not already registered on the above booking site. Please use the above link to do so, as it will provide you access to all the Multi-agency available for professionals in Halton

What happened after our learning circles and local reflective reviews?

- I. Following all the learning reviews, reports were presented to the Quality and Impact Group with recommended actions. These actions were then documented on the HSCP learning Improvement tracker and assigned workstreams.
- II. Training events were facilitated and advertised across the HSCP (see examples above)
- III. Professional pages were added to the HSCP web site to guide and support practitioners on protocols, support services and the use of toolkits.
- IV. When necessary, Task and Finish Groups initiated, as with the review of the Neglect toolkits.
- V. The digital learning offer was enhanced with multi-agency partners collaborating on the creation of learning resources.
- VI. The HSCP Scorecard was enhanced with additional indicators, e.g. ketamine indicators.
- VII. Multi-agency audits were conducted, for example in relation to strategy meetings and the SCP's response to neglect.
- VIII. The HSCP consulted with other partnerships to ensure they were abreast of key findings, e.g. Public Health and Safer Community Partnership re ketamine.

8.2 Key learning that resulted from the Rapid Review for Child N

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel discussed our rapid review for Child N on 3 September 2024 and, following careful consideration of the information provided, agreed with our decision not to undertake a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR). The panel noted the wider public health work we are doing with the Cheshire Child Death Overview Panel regarding updating guidance on water safety for professionals and parents for the safe use of hot tubs when there are young children present. At the time of writing this annual report, there have been no further incidents in our region in relation to water safety in the home environment.



Partnership Briefing
Issue No: 70 May 2024

E-Mail: CYPsafeguardingPartnership@halton.gov.uk 0151 511 7909

Please share this briefing and poster within all your agencies ahead of the imminent school holidays

Pan Cheshire Child Death Overview Panel
Following a very sad, tragic and preventable incident last weekend when children had got into difficulty in open water: Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service issued this message to remind the public that:
"The water may look calm on the surface, but there can be strong undercurrents that could pull even a strong swimmer under the water."
"And even when the weather feels very hot, the water may feel warm on the surface, but just a few feet below the surface it can be icy cold – affecting the stamina and strength of even strong swimmers."
"If you are with someone who gets into difficulty, call emergency services for help. If you can, use an object to try and reach for them, but don't put yourself in danger by entering the water."

Summer water safety

Accidents are mostly preventable with the correct knowledge and judgment and here are our tips to staying safe in the water during the summer:

To enjoy the water safely and make the right call...

- Enter slowly and carefully. Think carefully about your ability to splash or swim in cold outdoor water. 49% of those who lost their life were classified as swimmers*. Are you really a good swimmer?
- Stay within reach. Don't go too far and stay within a standing depth.
- Always be supervised. Over 70% of fatal accidents occur in the absence of professional supervision. Seek life guarded areas and always make sure some one is available to raise the alarm.

Summer is an amazing time to enjoy our beautiful waterways but we must be mindful that warmer weather is directly linked to an increase in fatal drowning incidents. Rivers and Lakes/Lochs pose the greatest statistical risk as there are often hazards that the average person is equipped to handle and there is a lack of professional supervision.

In an emergency...

- Call 999. Ask for the Fire and Rescue Service when inland and the Coastguard if at the coast. Don't enter the water to rescue.
- If you're in trouble FLOAT and call for help. Fall in or become tired – stay calm, float on your back and call for help. Throw something that floats to somebody that has fallen in.


STOP AND THINK


STAY TOGETHER


CALL 999


FLOAT



WATER SAFETY ADVICE FOR THE HOME

Drowning happens silently. A drowning child can't speak or control their arms. It's only in the movies they splash about and cry for help.

Baths - At home, younger children are most likely to drown in the bath or garden pond. There may be no warning that something is wrong, as babies drown silently in as little as 5 cm of water.

- A baby should never be left alone even for a moment
- Bath seats are not float aids
- Get everything you need ready before bath time so you're not tempted to nip to grab anything
- Don't rely on your toddler to keep an eye on the baby as they're still too young to understand danger.



Paddling Pools and Ponds - Drain paddling pools when not in use and cover garden ponds securely if fencing isn't an option.

- Empty the paddling pool out after you've used it
- Turn a pond into a sandpit, or fence it in or cover it while your children are little
- Make sure your child can't get to the neighbour's pond
- Be alert to ponds or pools when visiting other people's homes
- Ensuring fencing is used around residential swimming pools



Hot Tubs:

Many families have hot tubs in their gardens or visit friends who have one. **Never leave a hot tub lid off** and always replace the cover even if you are going inside for just a short amount of time. Babies and young children are naturally inquisitive and can easily climb in to explore..



What do we need to do next?

Partner attendance and engagement at HSCP learning events is consistently excellent and several cogent recommendations are made and upheld by strategic leaders and Executive. After this, training is enhanced, protocols are often revised, dashboards are improved, and sometimes thematic audits are undertaken. However, we need to get better at periodically revisiting our learning priorities and assessing in a more granular, evidence-based fashion the impact of our actions. This should include a review of whether more work is needed to embed such changes or whether activity needs to be modified and/or further adapted for optimum gains.

9. Quality Assurance

One of the core functions of the Safeguarding Partnership is to seek assurance about practice in Halton. To this aim we have undertaken a wide range of auditing activity in the last year. Each audit has been completed with the support and expertise of representatives across the multiagency group, with methodology adjusted according to the nature and matter under review. Methods used include self-assessment, file audits, roundtable discussions and the development of bespoke review tools.

The findings, analysis and recommendations of each review have been communicated to the relevant subgroup, with a standalone report produced for each audit. The engagement of safeguarding partners with the review process has been generally positive.

9.1 Learning from the s175 audit

Auditing activity commissioned during this reporting period included the s175 audit. This is a biennial mandatory process which takes place across all schools in Halton. The audit helps to identify strengths, learning opportunities, areas requiring support and individual actions for schools.

Summary of Key Findings:

- We had a particularly good response from schools and colleges with 96% completing their s175 audit and the remaining 4% partially completing the audit. This compares to a completion rate of 97% in 2023 and 93% in 2021.
- We broadly agreed with the majority of schools who judged that they had met or exceeded standards and felt that, overall, schools accurately recognised gaps or areas for improvement.
- Schools completing the audit felt that for 92.5% of the questions they were meeting or exceeding standards which is almost identical to the previous s175 audit in 2023 when this figure was 92.6%. Respondents noted that standards were being partially met in 5.4% of the questions and in only 2.1% of the responses did settings feel they had not met the standard at all.

- Standards around Voice of the Child had the highest proportion of Exceeds grades (24.24%) followed by Designated Safeguarding Lead (22.22%) and Safeguarding Culture (20.63%). Conversely, the standard arounds Escalation (4.76%), Online Safety (8.06%) and Managing Concerns (9.52%) had the lowest. These areas were similar to the returns in 2023 when Voice of the Child, Safeguarding Culture and Designated Governor were the standards receiving the strongest responses while the Designated Teacher, Online Safety and Escalation attracted the lower self-assessment grades.
- 89.06% schools reported that they had completed all actions from the previous audit (compared to 89.23% in 2023).

A review panel conducted a deep dive to consider the responses of 10% of the schools in each of the 12 areas documented on their audit. Audits were selected based on the Ofsted grades awarded to schools, and the time that has elapsed since their last Ofsted inspection. One setting was also identified as it is a new provision in Halton. The review panel broadly agreed with the majority of grades and shared individual s175 audit feedback with each of the settings that identified areas of strength and areas for the school to further develop. Some of the common areas identified from the deep dive analysis for further development included:

- Quality Assurance Framework: the need for settings to monitor the effectiveness of their safeguarding training to identify safeguarding gaps and issues.
- Child-focused: to ask that future audit submissions provide some examples to illustrate impact from the perspective of the child, i.e. what this means for the child.
- Greater clarity around how the Designated Teacher ensures that Pupil Premium funding is allocated to the individual child and particularly how such impact is monitored.
- Greater clarity on how the setting ensures staff are aware of the School's Unauthorised Absence and Children Missing in Education Procedures.
- Clearer reference to all the ways in which young people are briefed on the safe use of electronic media, including mobile phones.

The review panel noted that schools were broadly successful at completing the gaps or areas for improvement they had referenced on their previous s175 submission. Moreover, some schools in the deep dive provided a lot of relevant information in their audit submission, but a small number lacked sufficient detail to confidently understand the quality and impact of safeguarding arrangements.

S175 Arrangements for 2025-27

The Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership encourages schools to return to their 2025 s175 audit submission in the 2025/26 academic year and continue to make updates where necessary so it remains a live and up-to-date safeguarding document.

Thus, schools can continue to login and make changes accordingly until such time as the next s175 audit is re-launched in conjunction with PHEW in the 2026/27 academic year.

The gaps identified by schools themselves, through deep dive analysis and by a wider desk top scrutiny have been very helpful in informing the future training offers of Halton's Education Team and the Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership.

The key themes to emerge from the 2025 s175 audit where focus will be directed in 2025/26 are captured below:

- ❖ Front Door/Early Help access arrangements
- ❖ Private Fostering
- ❖ Use of screening tools
- ❖ Unauthorised absence and children missing education
- ❖ Understanding Harmful Sexual Behaviour
- ❖ Operation Encompass



9.2 Learning from the s11 audit

Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 places duties on a range of organisations and individuals to ensure their functions, and those of any services that they contract out to others or license, are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The application of this duty varies according to the nature of each agency and its functions.

During this reporting period, the HSCP undertook an audit of compliance with section 11 across relevant partnership member organisations. The findings provided assurance that the organisations that completed the self-assessment are discharging their duties with regards to the welfare of children and are therefore compliant with the duties set out in Section 11 Children Act 2004 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023.

The areas that we assessed on the s11 were as follows:

1. Senior Management Commitment to the importance of Safeguarding and promoting children's welfare
2. Leadership & Accountability
3. Listening to Children and Young People
4. Complaints, Allegations and Whistleblowing
5. Professional Challenge and Escalation
6. Information Sharing, Communication and Confidentiality
7. Safer Recruitment





8. Supervision and Support

9. Equality, Safety and Protection

10. Staff Induction

11. Programme of Internal Audit and Review

A rating system was applied with organisations grading themselves against each of the 11 areas. After aggregating the responses from partners, areas of strength for the partnership are:

- ✓ Leadership and accountability
- ✓ Safer recruitment
- ✓ Staff induction.

The key opportunities for development are around listening to the voice of the child and equality, safety, and protection. There is also an opportunity to enhance the programme of internal audit and review.

Next Steps:

For most of the applicable standards that were marked as 'partially met,' organisations documented their proposed actions. This provides a useful framework for organisations to monitor and develop their own compliance in the next 12 months.

Furthermore, in 2025/26, the Pan Cheshire Partnerships want to adopt a scrutiny process whereby organisations that work across Cheshire, e.g. Police, ICB, Youth Justice Service, Cheshire Fire, Probation etc come together on a biennial basis to peer challenge themselves against the s11 standards. At the same time, individual partnerships will facilitate similar peer challenge opportunities for organisations specific to their local authority, e.g. some housing associations, Children's Social Care, Early Years settings.

Finally, a more detailed scrutiny of the s11 submissions, rather than the current desktop analysis that is reliant on self-reporting is proposed for 2025/26. This detailed scrutiny would involve safeguarding leads from the statutory organisations coming together to scrutinise and moderate the audits of their partner agencies. Moreover, it would allow partners the opportunity to ask questions and seek further assurance in respect of any standards not suitably documented by an organisation on their s11 submission. If upheld as safeguarding gaps, these would help inform single agency action plans.

9.3 Multi-Agency Audits

Multi-agency audit activity during the reporting period focused on the following themes:

1. The quality and effectiveness of strategy meetings and discussions (July 2024)
2. Compliance in relation to the new Practice Standard and Guidance for Strategy meetings and discussions (Oct 2024)
3. Children as Victims of Domestic Abuse (Dec 2024)
4. The Quality and Timeliness of our responses in relation to Neglect (March 2025)



9.4 Multi-agency audit on Strategy Meetings

What did we learn from the multi-agency audits focusing on strategy meetings?

- Auditors are satisfied that the right agencies were at the meetings. There is a shared view by auditors that attempting to involve all agencies who may hold information about the family, such as housing providers, could cause considerable delay.
- There are at times several meetings in one day, and the timings of these may conflict, thereby compromising attendance occasionally. However, Safeguarding Nurses contributed to all strategy meetings and provided written reports when there was a conflict of time.
- There are mixed responses about the quality of the safety plans developed during the strategy meeting. The focus appears to be on sharing information and deciding on outcome, rather than on what needs to happen next.
- An emerging theme that required further exploration in the audit discussion was information sharing. Indeed, the timeliness of written records after the meeting was variable and appeared wholly dependent on individual social workers within CSC.
- The ownership of information and duty to share also required further exploration.
- When we do not meet standards around timeliness, the rationale for this is not always recorded clearly in each organisations electronic recording system, nor is there any evidence of formal challenge/escalation readily available.

- We are transparent in our decision making around informing parents. and auditors are confident that we are making the right decisions in this area.

What did we do to improve strategy meetings as a result of audit activity?

- ✓ The Multi Agency Best Practice Standards and Guidance was revised using the content of the multi-agency audit and discussions and approved by Executive.
- ✓ A second multi-agency audit three months later scrutinised how closely the new Multi-Agency Best Practice Standards and Guidance were being followed.
- ✓ Monthly reports have been compiled to record the timeliness of strategy meetings and the attendance of the 3 core partners and Education.
- ✓ A multi-agency digital resource was created and disseminated across the HSCP to ensure all front-line practitioners understand the protocols vis-à-vis strategy meetings.
- ✓ A multi-agency training event took place focusing on strategy meetings and s47 enquiries.
- ✓ Monthly reporting to partners ensures the timeliness and engagement of the core partners and Education is shared at all Improvement Board meetings.

What difference has this made?

- ❖ At the time of writing the annual report, attendance at strategy meetings is now typically at 100% for Health, CSC and Police and 90%+ for Education., as documented in the monthly strategy reports.
- ❖ Timeliness is now recorded as 83% within 24 hours; 10% within 48 hours; 5% within 72 hours and 2% exceed 72 hours.

9.5 Multi-agency audit focusing on children as victims of domestic abuse.

What did we learn from the multi-agency audit focusing on children as victims of domestic abuse?

➤	Domestic Abuse (DA) awareness training is an integral element of training for all new staff in the majority of organisations, irrespective of position within organisation.
➤	Some partners offer dedicated Voice of the Child Training (VoC) which explores the importance of capturing VoC, the legislation, methods, and options for recording the VoC and using this in practice and service improvement. However, this was not referenced in all responses.
➤	Some providers offered support to the research which shows the experience of early childhood victimisation (predominantly DV) is highly prevalent in the lives of children who perpetrate violence themselves (violence breeds violence albeit not necessarily DV breeds DV). Many children who have experienced DV in childhood do express negative emotions through aggression and violence but towards peers and/or authority, not necessarily to intimate partners.

➤	Some professionals are trained in the importance of active listening to children and families so wishes and feelings are explicitly asked for as part of an assessment and prior to professionals attending multi-agency meetings about their risk and needs.
➤	Several partner agencies provide therapeutic support to children who have experienced DV, either direct 'talking therapy' from seconded CAMHs workers or through nationally recognised social prescribing models. This may involve a socially prescribed mindfulness activity (such as fishing) or other therapeutic outlet (lyric writing/rapping).
➤	All pregnant women who have or are experiencing domestic abuse have a delivery plan in place which shares appropriate information and safety plans for the mum and unborn during and post-delivery.
➤	Dedicated Victim Liaison Officers and Domestic Abuse Support Officers provide support to the victims of domestic abuse throughout a perpetrators' sentence. They share information on a timely basis with probation practitioners so action can be taken swiftly when risks escalate/change.
➤	Partner agencies report that for all domestic abuse referrals they enquire about children and unborn babies. Details are obtained accordingly, and appropriate referrals are made. Responders to this self-assessment feel a Think Family approach is becoming widely adopted across the region.
➤	Routine Enquiry is encouraged within maternity services and midwives are encouraged to provide 1-1 confidential time with all expectant mothers . This is the 2024/25 focus for the safeguarding slot on the midwifery study day.
➤	Partner agencies consistently noted how they engage fully in MARAC meetings and have dedicated reps who attend the meeting to share information, collate actions, and ensure actions are completed.
➤	Information sharing arrangements within Halton ensure that a police vulnerable person assessment (VPA) is shared with the Bridgewater safeguarding team for all domestic abuse incidents where there is a pre-school child present or either the victim or perpetrator has a child under 5 years of age (education are notified and respond about school age children).
➤	Partners feel the Police response to domestic violence and abuse has improved, e.g. regarding how they respond to victims, understanding what they have experienced, believing victims, understanding coercive control and how it impacts on victims' responses to the Police and putting into place domestic abuse prevention orders (DVPO) to protect victims.
➤	Partners feel it is working with perpetrators where the difference will be made. Historically the responsibility was said to be placed on the victim to make changes which did not work on its own. My Cheshire Without Abuse (My CWA) and the CHOICES Programme are said to be addressing a whole family approach and direct perpetrator work within custody is seen by partners as a good starting point.

Where did we need to improve as a result of audit activity?

1. Organisations report that they are aware of the services in Halton in relation to supporting victims of domestic abuse, but they have concerns that capacity in these services does not meet demand.
2. Some partners feel there are occasions where children are not seen as victims, and that myths such as they *"weren't present in the house during the incident"* *"the relationship has ended"* and *"it was an isolated incident"* can influence an assessment outcome. It is said the experience of the child can be overlooked and statements like *"school have no concerns"* or *"there are no health issues"* reflect this.
3. From a hospital perspective, it is said that there are occasions when discharges are delayed due to the lack of a safe discharge address. Access to refuge and local safe accommodation is not always available.

4. Working with perpetrators is seen by partners as a crucially important pro-active measure. However, the availability of such services is not readily understood by all.

What have we done to make a difference?

- ❖ Increased the capacity of services supporting victims of domestic abuse.
- ❖ Commenced a pilot 12-month project called: 'Breaking the Cycle of Domestic Abuse in Halton'. This has meant that a higher number of young people can access support programmes related to domestic abuse.
- ❖ Relaunched Operation Encompass so schools are receiving information about domestic abuse in a timelier manner and thus able to provide the appropriate nurture, counselling, and support for their pupils.
- ❖ Increased safe discharge capacity.
- ❖ Launched the Lundy Model for which the voice of the child is paramount.

9.6 Multi-agency audit on Neglect

What did we learn from the multi-agency audit focusing on the Quality and Timeliness of our responses in relation to Neglect?

- ✓ Audit responses consistently highlighted effective communication & information sharing between agencies.
- ✓ Audit returns reference good multi-agency working to support families.
- ✓ Numerous responses noted practitioners having good relationships with families; a number of these audit responses also referenced agencies exploring diverse ways to work with children and families to best support them.
- ✓ Several audit returns refer to timely interventions to support children and their families.
- ✓ Some audit returns evidenced a clever use of assessment tools to support decision making and monitor progress.
- ✓ Some audit responses noted there is evidence of voice of the child within assessments and case recordings.
- ✓ A small number of audit responses referenced both professionals and families feeling listened to.
- ✓ A small number of audit returns highlighted specific training being provided to practitioners to enable them to best support a child to manage their health needs.

Where did we need to improve as a result of audit activity?

- To have a recognised definition of poverty for Halton Children's Services, across all agencies.

- Clear exploration around causal factors of neglect built into screening and assessment tools and addressing these to be part of a plan for every child. Multi-Agency Practice Standards for Neglect would all need to include reference to causal factors, and what is being done to support parents.
- Neglect Multi-Agency Practice Standards to be shared with the Quality & Impact Group for review, and agreement around Task & Finish Group to review and update the Practice Standards, before being shared with Strategic Group for sign off.
- Assurance activity to be built into new Practice Standards to help ensure these standards become embedded and to monitor compliance, for example, periodic dip sampling to look at number of referrals accepted or rejected, and how many were submitted with / without a tool.
- Identify and link in with other adult, child and community focussed partnerships and boards to support the development of a whole community response to Poverty in Halton, e.g. the Poverty Alliance.

What have we done to make a difference?

- ❖ We are using research from the University of Plymouth to help establish a common framework that documents what our partner organisations should do to help tackle poverty, alongside what is currently being provided to address this in Halton. Our work will include an analysis of what approaches are most efficacious.
- ❖ We are consulting with other boards including the Well-Being Board and the Poverty Alliance to help tackle this collegiately.
- ❖ We now have an agreed definition for poverty.

10. How data is being used to inform practice

Partners submit data and narrative to the HSCP to form the multi-agency data dashboard. During the reporting period, the Partnership's scorecard was enhanced. The scorecard now evidences the indicators that are specific to each organisation and the key concerns they have. The scorecard also includes data specific to ad hoc initiatives, including ketamine. In addition, 'Storyboards' continue to be used. These storyboards are used by agencies to provide a narrative to the following:

- What is working well?
- What are you worried about?
- What are you doing about it?
- Updates from previous actions.

Within HSCP meetings each partner discusses their data, and the narrative storyboards are interrogated by partners to provide an indication of potential flaws in provision. Key trends and issues are then picked up and escalated to the Strategic Partnership Group for action. However, the HSCP should tighten up the processes, ensuring it is available every quarter from all partners and allocating more time for data scrutiny. All data is completely anonymised.

What we need to do with our data next year:

- Contribute to the NW RIPP dataset so we have a comparison with our north-west partners on a more varied and informative range of indicators than is currently available.
- Ensure the newer subgroups (Young people Voice & Influence Group and the Voice of the Child Operational Group) both have scorecards that can be interrogated every quarter.
- Ensure the HSCP Strategic Leadership Group gain assurance from each of the subgroups that they have a clear oversight of their subgroup's data and that they use it in a timely way to improve enhance safeguarding provision.
- Ensure the data collected by other Boards and Partnerships is shared with the HSCP so we have a complete, up-to-date, and holistic picture of safeguarding across our region.

11. Workforce Development

The HSCP delivered an extensive training programme between April 2024 - March 2025, supported through the shared expertise of the safeguarding partners. The HSCP delivered briefing and training on a range of safeguarding topics, including:

- ❖ Intra-Familial Child Sexual Abuse
- ❖ Honour Based Abuse
- ❖ Responding to Sexual Assault & Violence
- ❖ Mental Health Disorder and Parenting Capacity
- ❖ Intra-Familial Child Sexual Abuse
- ❖ Non-Fatal Strangulation and Suffocation
- ❖ Educational Neglect
- ❖ Missing From Home
- ❖ Abuse of Position of Trust for Sexual Purposes
- ❖ Understanding Neglect and Local Procedures
- ❖ Child Sexual Abuse Tools and Survivor's Story
- ❖ Working Together to Safeguard Children (Refresher)
- ❖ Child Exploitation Awareness
- ❖ Understanding Harmful Sexual Behaviour-Erase Tool
- ❖ DASH (2009-2024) Risk Identification, Assessment and Management Model and how to use it.
- ❖ Prevent
- ❖ Trauma Informed Awareness



- ❖ Ketamine Awareness
- ❖ Neurodevelopmental Conditions Professionals Awareness Raising
- ❖ Working Together to Safeguard Children Level 3
- ❖ Reducing Parental Conflict
- ❖ Mental Health Disorder - parenting capacity
- ❖ Managing Allegations Against People who work or volunteer with children.
- ❖ Sexual Violence Awareness
- ❖ Domestic Abuse Awareness

11.1 Training Analysis:

Attendance at multi-agency training showed a dramatic improvement for this reporting period. This has largely culminated from the reduction in professionals failing to attend a training event onto which they were booked. In the period April-September 2024, 936 multiagency partners booked onto training events but only 543 attended the event (393 no shows). This equated to an attendance record of only 58%. However, in the period October 2024-March 2025, the attendance percentage improved to 87% with 708 professionals attending the training events they booked onto (only 107 no shows). This has partly been a result of the Charging Policy the Business Unit now applies to practitioners who fail to attend or provide late notice of their inability to attend.

This year, the Executive identified the difficulties in releasing staff for training events when the capacity on the ground for operational duties is often compromised. Therefore, the Partnership is now supplementing its face to face and online courses with multi-agency virtual materials. These have been created by multi-agency partners but with the understanding that single agencies will use their training calendars to ensure these key messages are disseminated. These shared multi-agency training resources have been enhanced with the creation of a Strategy Meeting SWAY and a Section 47 SWAY. These two resources compliment an ever-increasing suite of multi-agency materials that include areas such as the Voice of the Child, Professional Resolution, and ICON.

The difficulties in attracting multi-agency partners to support the HSCP Training Pool resulted in training being identified as



Partnership Briefing
Issue No: 93 December 2024
E-Mail: CYPsafeguardingPartnership@halton.gov.uk

Multi-Agency Drug & Alcohol Event
‘A focus on ketamine, highlighting risks and the support available in Halton’

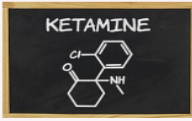
Nationally, there were 14,352 children and young people (aged 17 and under) in alcohol and drug treatment between April 2023 and March 2024. This is a 16% increase from the previous year .

There was also a rise in the number reporting problems with ketamine, from 4.5% in 2021 to 2022 to 8.4% this year, which means more children & young people reported problems with ketamine than with cocaine for the first time. (Gov.uk 28.11.2024).

This rise in Ketamine use is evident in Halton too.

A Multi-Agency Drug & Alcohol Event is being held on **21st January 2025, at the DCBL Stadium.**

Participants will leave with a deeper understanding of ketamine use and other drug trends, the confidence to spot warning signs, and a clear action plan for accessing support and working collaboratively to safeguard young people.



KETAMINE

Book your place now

If you have not already registered on the above booking site. Please use the above link to do so, as it will provide you access to all the Multi-agency available for professionals in Halton



Partnership Briefing
Issue No: 98 March 2025
E-Mail: CYPsafeguardingPartnership@halton.gov.uk

AI-generated CSA images

In February, the Government announced plans to outlaw apps designed to create artificially generated child sexual abuse material and later in the month, Europol and the Joint Cybercrime Action Taskforce (J-CAT) helped coordinate a global investigation, and arrests were made over suspected involvement in the distribution of AI-generated images and video of child sexual abuse material (CSAM).



User writes a text prompt A.I. tool interprets the prompt Image produced

As a professional, it's important to remember that you already have the core skills you need to respond to this form of harm. To help, the Centre of Expertise for CSA have published a [blog post for professionals](#) that explains what AI generated child sexual abuse material is, and how to respond to if you are worried a child has been featured in this material, or an adult or child has seen or produced it themselves.

The Centre also offer Free Webinars that can be [accessed here](#)

Webinar
Spotting the signs and indicators of child sexual abuse
09 Apr 2025 10:00 - 11:00

Webinar
Supporting parents / carers when their child may have been sexually abused
14 May 2025 09:00 - 10:00

Webinar
Responding to harmful sexual behaviour in education settings
20 May 2025 16:00 - 17:00

Webinar
Putting the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway into practice
28 May 2025 13:00 - 14:00

Webinar
Speaking to children about sexual abuse
01 Jun 2025 16:00 - 17:00

a risk on the HSCP Risk Register. However, in the last 6 months of the reporting period, we have seen a significant increase in multi-agency partners contributing to the delivery of training courses. This is evident from the HSCP training calendar that now documents the organisation/s supporting the delivery of every learning event. In addition, the suite of virtual materials has also meant organisations have more autonomy in when multi-agency training is delivered.

Numerous Partnership Briefings have been shared to help raise awareness of other training events offered by local agencies, and to update all stakeholders on key safeguarding messages, a small selection is contained within this report. Each briefing currently reaches approximately 700 partners from across the region and continues to increase as our distribution lists are updated.

Following a review of the 2024/25 training offer, 2 additional training events are now being facilitated with the support of the HSCP Business Unit. These focus on two areas identified in recent inspection reports, namely MAPs and Private Fostering. MAP training has typically attracted low numbers of attendees, and the training has not culminated in significant increases in the numbers of MAPs being led by the wider partnership. In addition, the HSCP has not promoted learning events centred on Private Fostering in recent years. Hence, several training events have been identified for 2025/26 that will enhance practitioner knowledge and seek to address barriers in these two domains.

11.2 Trauma Informed Halton

Halton recognises the evidence base that is emerging day by day, across both national and international communities, which identifies the impact of trauma and the consequences of exposure to adversity as a profound health, wellbeing, and social care issue of our time. During 2024/25, the HSCP has therefore sought to ensure that we adopt a trauma informed practice across our region. Trauma-informed practice is achieved when we:

- ❖ Realise what trauma is and how it can have widespread impact for children, young people, families, and communities.
- ❖ Recognise the signs and effects of trauma in individual children, young people, families, groups, and communities.
- ❖ Respond by integrating knowledge regarding trauma-informed approaches into safeguarding policies, procedures, and practice.
- ❖ Resist re-traumatising children, young people, families, and communities by actively seeking to avoid situations where traumatic memories might be retriggered and seeking to deescalate and diffuse potentially traumatic interactions when they occur.
- ❖ Resilience is promoted in supporting children, young people, families, and communities to cope with and adapt to adversity and have the strength to challenge situations where it might occur.



Partnership Briefing
Issue No: 91 October 2024
E-Mail: CYPsafeguardingpartnership@halton.gov.uk

Trauma Informed Safeguarding sessions



Created in partnership with Warrington Safeguarding Adult & Children's Partnership, this course is a concise exploration of the relationship between Trauma and Safeguarding Vulnerability. The course aims to help staff better understand the circumstances of adverse childhood experience that create Trauma and the developmental impact of trauma in terms of how this shapes our thoughts, behaviours and relationships throughout life.

During the session we consider the impact of trauma as a push-pull factor in a range of safeguarding scenarios including child & adult exploitation, domestic abuse and neglect. The session also highlights how some professional and organisational approaches can compound a person's experience of trauma and provides insights on effective models and tips for developing a Trauma Informed approach to recognising and responding to safeguarding children & adult concern.

Sessions are available to be booked now for:
18th November 2024 10:30-12:00
or
19th November 2024 13:30-15:00

Book your place now

If you have not already registered on the above booking site, please use the above link to do so, as it will provide you access to all the Multi-agency available for professionals in Halton

Consequently, over 150 practitioners and managers were trained in Trauma Informed Practice, and nine trainers were trained to roll out further training programmes in the future. In addition, strategic leads have ensured that a trauma informed approach is intrinsic to new strategies launched across the region in the reporting period, including the Pan Cheshire All Age Exploitation strategy and the revision of Halton's Neglect Strategy.

12. Communication Strategy

A key area of work for the HSCP is the effective delivery of information to professionals working with children, senior leaders, community partners, and parents/ carers, so that children and young people are safeguarded, and their wellbeing supported.

Our approach to communication-as documented in our Communication Strategy- is based on the following principles:

- ❖ Information is a service in its own right.
- ❖ Information should be accessible to everyone.
- ❖ Communication should be clear and open using plain English (e.g., avoiding jargon and explaining acronyms) or giving clear explanations where this is not possible.
- ❖ Promoting equality and valuing diversity is central to the provision of information.
- ❖ A commitment to keeping information up to date and relevant.
- ❖ Information may need to be delivered in the spoken word to be effective.
- ❖ Consultation and engagement are central to the Partnership's continuous improvement.

Therefore, during the reporting period we have used a wealth of methods to communicate to our audiences:

- Annual Report and Strategic Plans
- Subgroups/Task and Finish Groups/Local Reflective Reviews/Local CSPRs
- Quarterly newsletters
- 7-minute Guides
- Partnership Briefings
- Induction presentations, e.g. Social Worker Academy
- Emails and email briefings



- Training/briefing sessions/ workshops
- Conferences/ media statements
- Leaflets/Posters/ Factsheets
- Press releases.
- Lunch and Learn sessions.
- Public Events/ roadshows
- Service User and Practitioner feedback (Surveys /forums)
- Social media i.e. LinkedIn
- Staff supervision
- Visual media sources
- Participation in Community Group events



How will we know we have made a difference?

Our Communication Strategy endeavours to make a difference in the following ways:

- ✓ All stakeholders will know what safeguarding is, how to protect themselves and how to report abuse.
- ✓ Our audiences will understand the role, remit, and work of the HSCP and will be able to access information about it.
- ✓ People's experiences of safeguarding will inform future communications and improvements to safeguarding practice.
- ✓ The workforce will understand their respective roles and responsibilities in safeguarding, leading to improvements in multi-agency working and outcomes for service users.
- ✓ Better outcomes for children and young people involved in safeguarding.
- ✓ Increase in positive media coverage.

The Communication Strategy and the Implementation Plan that supports the strategy can be accessed on the HSCP web site: [Home - Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)

During the reporting period, the HSCP also continued to develop its web site. The web site contains numerous pieces of safeguarding information including:

- ✓ Governance & Reporting Arrangements
- ✓ Helpful resources for children and young people
- ✓ Policy, Procedures, and toolkit guidance for professionals
- ✓ The ability to book onto HSCP training events.
- ✓ Latest news, including Partnership briefings.
- ✓ Avenues of support for parents and carers
- ✓ Key learning recommendations

- ✓ Links to partner agencies.

This evidences the effectiveness of the HSCP's communication strategy in reaching a variety of frontline workers and community members. The website is regularly updated with latest news and information and is a useful resource in advertising training events across the region.

Our website remains a useful repository for our policies, guidance, and leaflets. We have invested in Search Engine Optimisation technology to ensure that searches for documents on our website are easily accessible. Web analytics also enable us to analyse the most viewed pages and respond in a timely manner to pages where enhancements are needed to increase footfall.

13.Independent Scrutiny

The three safeguarding partners are responsible for determining local arrangements including the provision of independent scrutiny. The independent scrutiny function is described on pages 36-38 of *Working Together 2023*. Independent scrutiny provides the critical challenge and appraisal of Halton's multi-agency safeguarding partnership arrangements in relation to children and young people by doing the following:

- Providing assurance in judging the effectiveness of services to protect children
- Assisting when there is disagreement between the leaders responsible for protecting children in the agencies involved in multi-agency arrangements.
- Supporting a culture and environment conducive to robust scrutiny and constructive challenge.

The independent scrutineer works independently of the three safeguarding partners and Education, in liaison with the HSCP Business Unit.

Anna Berry became Halton's independent scrutineer in January 2024. A description of the key role of the independent scrutineer in Halton can be found on the partnership's website.

13.1 Feedback from Anna Berry, Independent Scrutineer

The Independent Scrutineer for the Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) presented quarterly reports, and an end of year scrutiny report to the Delegated Safeguarding Partners in the reporting period of this annual report. These reports outlined the key developments of the partnership over the year and made some recommendations for the year ahead.

The role of the scrutineer is to ask questions about how well services are safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people in Halton. Whilst there is no set list of things for a scrutineer to do or how to do them, activity was agreed with the SCP Executive throughout the year in alignment with their arrangements. This included a review of the arrangements under WT23 implementation, a self-assessment and scrutiny response exercise culminating in recommendations, participation in the Regional Improvement Programme (RIP), and overall effectiveness of the subgroups. This activity was supplemented by regular participation in strategic meetings, review of relevant SCP documents, engagement with partner agencies, business manager, chairs of the subgroups, information obtained from the Halton Strategic partnership meeting, observations of the work of some of the subgroups, review of meeting minutes and action logs, and ongoing observations of overall SCP processes and systems.

Overall, there is observation of good partner engagement, positive relationships, and an appetite for the success of joint children's arrangements. The amount of work undertaken within HSCP to develop, strengthen and function is vast and provides a solid foundation for the HSCP, in particular and not exhaustive:

- Under the neglect priority, the revision of the Neglect Assessment Framework, and a focus on Multi Agency Plans (MAPS) which has demonstrated an increase of MAPs across the partnership.
- Under the exploitation priority, the development and strengthening of the contextual safeguarding arrangements and a Ketamine task and finish group.
- Under the domestic abuse priority, the SCP has undertaken a mock JTAI and made recommendations which sit within the Halton Domestic Abuse Board
- The development of the Young People's Voice and Influence Group
- A full review of the training offer
- Dissemination of learning identified through multi agency audits e.g. S47 SWAY package.

The independent scrutineer has worked closely with the business manager and the strategic partnership meeting in its work throughout the year, and the scrutiny work plan is intended to add value and run alongside the functions and mechanisms of the SCP. There are a number of key points identified throughout the scrutiny report as areas for development, and areas for further scrutiny which can be broadly summarised into the thematic areas of impact and outcomes, engagement, resource, and leadership. This will influence the scrutiny work for 2025/2026.



14. The Future

14.1 HSCP Priorities for 2025-26

The HSCP's current Business Plan 2025-27 will continue in the next reporting period with the workstreams, and programmes further developed.

Hence, our 3 key priorities will continue to be:

1. Improving the quality and timeliness of our practice in relation to neglect.
2. Safeguarding Children from Violence and Exploitation
3. Protecting children as victims of domestic abuse

In addition, cross-cutting themes will continue to be a key feature in Partnership working. Progress against these cross-cutting themes will be discussed in partnership meetings, scrutinised by the Independent Scrutineer, and reported on in next year's annual report. The cross-cutting themes are as follows:

Theme 1: Strengthening the Partnership's relationships with all relevant children, adult and community focussed boards and partnerships across Cheshire. This is particularly relevant in relation to the Halton Safeguarding Adults Board as we strive to ensure transitional arrangements are robust, effective, and widely understood.

Theme 2: Measuring the effectiveness and impact of the Children's Partnership. (see 14.2 and work with Northwest Multi-Agency Safeguarding Learning and Support Hub).

Theme 3: Co-production: ensuring the voices of children and families are consistently heard and their voices influence service planning and delivery (see 14.2).

The finer detail on how the HSCP will deliver on these priority areas and the cross-cutting themes is documented within the following key delivery plans:

- ✓ The Contextual Safeguarding Strategic Group Delivery Plan 2025-26
- ✓ The Health Subgroup Delivery Plan 2025-26
- ✓ The Young People Voice & Influence Group Delivery Plan 2025-26
- ✓ The Education Subgroup Delivery Plan 2025-26
- ✓ The Quality & Impact Group Delivery Plan 2025-26



14.2 North West Multi-Agency Safeguarding Learning and Support Hub

Furthermore, the HSCP will be working closely in 2025/26 with the Northwest Multi–Agency Safeguarding Learning and Support Hub to strengthen and support our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Arrangements (MASAs). The Learning and Support Hub endeavours to:

“Collaborate better to improve child centred, multi-agency practice; nurturing a culture of trust, accountability, and support for our children.”

The key opportunities provided by such collaboration include:

- To **share** and embed multi-agency practice that is improving outcomes for children and families.
- To **enable** the system to demonstrate the impact and effectiveness of multi-agency practice
- To **collaborate** better together by facilitating spaces for collaboration at a sub-regional and regional level.

The desired Impact of our Collaboration with the Northwest Multi-Agency Safeguarding Learning and Support Hub:

An improved understanding of safeguarding effectiveness and performance of Halton’s Safeguarding Children Partnership. Data will be used more meaningfully to understand our local safeguarding effectiveness, and to target activity to understand local need and priorities. This will ensure that identified priorities for our partnership are evidence- based and proportionate for local children and their families. There will also be an improved understanding of “what works” across our local MASA to enhance local safeguarding effectiveness, insights, performance, scrutiny, and assurance.

The Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership will also have a robust safeguarding effectiveness and quality assurance framework, which is evidence based and used to target multi agency activity to improve outcomes for children and families. There will be an improved shared understanding of local issues that affect children and their families in Halton and commitment from partners in addressing key challenges. The partnership will also be able to demonstrate the impact of partnership activity and strategic direction and decision making for the partnership will be evidence based.

Finally, Halton’s SCP will be robust, efficient, and effective. Partners will work together effectively to protect children. There will be a co-ordinated and effective local response to safeguarding concerns, with agencies working collaboratively to assess risks and to provide support.

How this will be delivered in collaboration with the Northwest Multi-Agency Safeguarding Learning and Support Hub is documented in Halton’s Bespoke Offer 2025-26



14.3 Annual reporting arrangements

Both the HSCP Strategic Leadership Group and the Executive will review a final draft of the annual report for 2024/25 in September 2025. The report will then be submitted to the Department for Education by 30 September 2025.

This annual report will be available on the partnership's website here: [Home - Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)

15. Glossary

A & E	Accident and Emergency
ACE	Adverse Childhood Experience
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CE	Child Exploitation
CIC	Children in Care
CP	Child Protection
CSA	Child Sexual Abuse
CSC	Children's Social Care
CSSG	Contextual Safeguarding Strategic Group
CSOG	Contextual Safeguarding Operational Group
CSPR	Child Safeguarding Practice Review
CSSG	Child Safeguarding Subgroup
CYP	Children and Young People
DASH	Domestic Abuse, Stalking, Harassment and Honour Based Violence Assessment
DFE	Department for Education
DSL	Delegated Safeguarding Lead
DSP	Delegated Safeguarding Partners
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EHCP	Education Health Care Plan
FE	Further Education
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GRT	Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people
HBC	Halton Borough Council
HSCP	Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership
ICART	Integrated Contact and Referral Team
ICB	Integrated Care Board
IDVA	Independent Domestic Abuse Advisor

JTAI	Joint Targeted Area Inspection
LADO	Local Authority Designated Officer
LMS	Learning Management System
LSCB	Local Safeguarding Children Board
LSP	Lead Safeguarding Partner
MAP	Multi Agency Plan
MASA	Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
PEP	Personal Education Plan
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
QIG	Quality and Impact Group
RIPP	Research into Pilot Practice
SCP	Safeguarding Children Partnership
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SGO	Special Guardianship Order
SPOC	Specific Point of Contact
VOC	Voice of the Child

REPORT TO:	Children Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board
DATE:	10 November 2025
REPORTING OFFICER:	Executive Director of Children's Services
PORTFOLIO:	Children Young People and Families
SUBJECT:	Halton's Virtual School Annual Report 2024-25
WARD(S)	Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the board with the Headteacher of the Virtual School's Annual Report 2023-24 on the educational outcomes and achievement for Halton's Children in Care, and the school's wider work across children's services.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the board:

- i) Note the information provided.**
- ii) Accept the Headteacher of the Virtual School's annual report as an accurate account of the performance on the education outcomes and achievement of Halton Children in Care.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Please see the attached report for the detailed data, analysis and summary of the work of Halton Virtual School during the academic year 2024-25.
- 3.2 The work of the Virtual School has continued throughout the academic year and the full annual report provides detailed analysis of how Halton's Children in Care have performed against each of the individual key performance indicators, as well as a summary of the Virtual School's progress towards it's identified key priorities for the academic year 2024-25 and the priorities for the Virtual School in 2025-26.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 Please see below regarding national policy changes that will have implications for the support provided through Halton Virtual School.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Halton Virtual School relies heavily on the use of Pupil Premium Plus funding from the Government to support the educational outcomes of Children in Care. This includes support provided through the Personal Education Plan, for the staffing required to carry out its duties to a high and effective standard, and the ability to commission specialist services such as psychological assessments, for example, as well as provide direct curriculum support for the children and young people. There is currently an agreement that this funding will remain in place until 2026 but that it will be reviewed to take into account other national budgetary changes and pressures. However, in recent years the remit of the Virtual School has only expanded and there is an expectation that this will continue.
- 5.2 Nevertheless, there is a major risk to the outcomes of our most vulnerable children if this funding ceases because Halton Virtual School will no longer be able to provide the high level and necessary educational support for our children in care. Since Halton's ILACS inspection in 2024, the Virtual School has added more capacity in order to keep delivering its very good work, so the grant funding has been used to meet this suggestion (details of the staffing structure are contained within the full annual report). If the grant funding used by the Virtual School ceases this will have a direct impact on its capacity to meet not only the statutory requirements but continue to deliver its Ofsted validated bespoke support model to Halton's children in care and our wider duties. Therefore, Council funding of at least the same level will need to be identified to mitigate against this.
- 5.3 Halton Virtual School continues to look to provide additional employment and training opportunities for Care Leavers through access to apprenticeships and work programmes. There needs to be a review of funding opportunities to support these and also creative opportunities both within the Council and within local businesses.

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

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

Research has demonstrated that issues related to the emotional health and well-being have a significant impact upon the educational outcomes for Children in Care. Timely and effective services are vital in providing emotional support for our young people to enable them to have positive engagement in their learning and achieve their potential.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

Research has demonstrated that issues related to the emotional health and well-being have a significant impact upon the educational outcomes for Children in Care. Timely and effective services are vital in providing emotional support for our young people to enable them to have positive engagement in their learning and achieve their potential.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

The educational outcomes for children in care, care leavers, post looked after children and those with a social worker remain a key priority for the council.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

Our most vulnerable children and young people will be able to make choices that mean that they can thrive and achieve. Children and young people will feel heard and have a positive experience of their time in education, they will be supported in realising their aspirations and feel supported to achieve. Young people will have positive experiences of growing up in Halton and be equipped for adult life.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

None.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

Due to their lived experiences Children in Care can be at higher risk of child criminal and sexual exploitation, and episodes of missing from care or school. Research does indicate that these factors, along with poor school attendance, all have a negative impact upon educational outcomes for our children and young people in care. Therefore, all agencies need to provide proactive support in order to keep children in care safe.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 If the outcomes for our Halton Children in care do not improve, then there is a continued risk that they are more likely to become NEET and not become active and positive partners in their community. The expanded remit of the Virtual School is working with wider children's Services and partners to mitigate this risk and therefore a risk assessment is not required.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 Children in Care and care experience young people continue to be

vulnerable groups whose life experiences of trauma, neglect and abuse mean that they have not had the same start to life as other young people

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None.

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

None under the meaning of the Act.

Summary Report - Halton Virtual School Annual Report 2024–2025:

Halton Virtual School Annual Report 2024–2025

Headteacher: Joanne Dunning

Overview

Halton Virtual School (HVS) is responsible for promoting the educational achievement of Looked-After Children (LAC), with strategic oversight for Post-Looked After Children (PLAC) and Children with a Social Worker (CWSW). The year saw leadership changes, with the Interim Headteacher becoming substantive in March 2024, and a team restructure planned for January 2026 to meet new statutory duties.

Key Priorities & Progress

1. **Reading Strategy:** Developed a comprehensive reading support programme, including targeted training, book parcels, and reading age data collection.
2. **Virtual School College:** Progressed the development of a Virtual College offer, enhanced NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) tracking, and increased apprenticeship opportunities for care-experienced young people.
3. **Attendance & Exclusions:** Strengthened attendance monitoring and multi-agency interventions, resulting in improved attendance (Primary: 96%, Secondary: 87%) and a reduction in exclusions.
4. **Support for Vulnerable Groups:** Expanded support for Kinship carers, CWSW, PLAC, and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), including new training and resources.

Cohort & Outcomes

- **Cohort:** 465 LAC (0–19), 202 care leavers (19–22), 330 PLAC in Halton schools.
- **Placement & School Moves:** 75 children had placement moves (increase from previous year); 26 had school moves.
- **SEND:** High proportion of LAC have SEND/EHCPs; 70% of EHCPs cite Social, Emotional, and Mental Health as primary need.
- **Academic Outcomes:**
 - **EYFS:** 44% achieved a Good Level of Development (up from 27%).
 - **Year 1 Phonics:** 62% met the standard.
 - **KS2:** Improvements in Reading, Maths, and Combined outcomes.
 - **KS4:** 29% achieved Grade 4+ in English, 19% in Maths, 14% in both.
 - **Progress:** 74% of KS1/2 pupils and 63% of KS3/4 made expected progress.

Attendance & Exclusions

- **Attendance:** Overall 91% (Primary 96%, Secondary 87%).
- **Exclusions:** One permanent exclusion; reduction in suspensions, especially repeat exclusions, due to targeted support and trauma-informed training.

Post-16 & Care Leavers

- **16–18:** 73% in education, employment, or training (up from 64%).
- **19–22:** 49% in EET; ongoing work to reduce NEET rates through partnerships and targeted support.

Pupil Premium Plus & Funding

- £838,567 allocated; 65% spent directly on children, with increased focus on measuring impact and benchmarking against other LAs.

Training & Development

- 301 delegates from 249 schools attended training; focus on attachment, trauma, and inclusive practice. Team members upskilled to deliver specialist training.

Action Plan & Next Steps (2025–26)

- Increase school readiness and GLD in Reception.
- Reduce attainment gaps for LAC.
- Embed support for vulnerable groups and the Virtual College offer.
- Further strengthen attendance, exclusions, and NEET interventions.

Further Information

More details, policies, and resources are available at www.myvirtualschool.org.

If you need a version tailored for a specific audience or a more visual summary (e.g., for governors or parents), just let me know!



HALTON'S VIRTUAL SCHOOL

Annual Report 2024-2025

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Introduction

The statutory duties of the Headteacher of the Virtual School include the production of an annual report to inform key stakeholders about the work of the Virtual School over the course of the year. The following report is a summary of work undertaken and the achievements of the children whose education we oversee.

The Virtual School is responsible for promoting the educational achievement of Looked-After Children (LAC) and strategic oversight for Post Looked-After Children (PLAC) and Children with a Social Worker (CWSW). For Looked-After Children, this includes the oversight and management of the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process and distribution of the Pupil Premium + funding. For PLAC and CWSW, the Virtual School has a strategic role in offering support, challenge and training to remove barriers to learning and raise the profile of education as a priority in plans.

There have been several changes within the leadership of the Virtual School this year. The Interim Headteacher became substantive in March 2024. The current team structure is undergoing a consultation process for restructuring due to the imminent changes to the Statutory duties for Virtual Schools. It is expected for the new structure to be live from January 2026.

Over this past academic year, we have focused on four key priorities, identified through the previous year's self-evaluation:

- **To develop a Halton Virtual School Reading Strategy**
- **Develop the Virtual School College**
- **Raise attendance and reduce the number of exclusions for all Children in Care**
- **Enhance the Virtual School offer for Vulnerable groups, including Kinship, Children with a Social Worker, Post-Looked After & UASC cohort**

This report shares a summary of our progress against each of these objectives, as well as wider performance measures, and our areas of focus for the 2025-2026 academic year.

Further documentation relating to the work of the Virtual School (including our policies and guidance documents) can be found on our website <https://www.myvirtualschool.org/>

Staffing and Governance Structure of the Virtual School

The Virtual School team have remained consistent in the last 12 months, with no new joiners or leavers. Due to the promotion of the Interim Headteacher, there is currently a vacancy within the team. As previously mentioned, the current structure is under review to ensure all team members can carry out their statutory duties. There are two team members that are now funded through the Pupil Premium Plus grant due to a review of financial responsibilities, this means that all members of the Virtual School team, excluding the Virtual School Headteacher, are grant funded. The Safeguarding

Children in Education Officer is line managed by the Virtual Headteacher but funded through the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Over the academic year, the Virtual School has worked alongside the Corporate Parenting Board to establish the 'operational group', who now act as the governing body for the Virtual School. They receive termly performance reports, through which they hold the school to account, as well as identify ways in which the Corporate Parenting Board can strengthen their role as Corporate Parent.

Halton Virtual School structure 2024-2025

Corporate Parenting Board			
Corporate Parenting Operational Group / Virtual School Governing Body			
Virtual School Senior Leadership Team			
Role	Name	Funding	Contract type
Headteacher	Joanne Dunning nee Lloyd	Core Funded	Ongoing grant
Secondary and Post 16 PEP and Progress Team Leader	Peter McPartland	Pupil Premium Plus	Ongoing grant
Early Years & Primary PEP and Progress Team Leader	Vacant	Pupil Premium Plus	Ongoing grant
Virtual School PEP and Wider Duties Team			
Early Years Education Support Worker (0.8)	Gemma Donaldson	Pupil Premium Plus	Ongoing grant
Primary PEP Co-ordinator	Sarah Rawnsley	Sec 31 SW Expansion	Ongoing grant
Secondary PEP Co-ordinator	Alys James	Sec 31 SW Expansion	Ongoing grant
KS4 and Post 16 Education and Employability Officer	Ian Wilson	Pupil Premium Plus	Ongoing grant
Post Looked After Support Worker and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children	David Bradshaw	Sec 31 Grant – PLAC / SW Expansion	Ongoing grant
School Age Education Support Worker	Min Ling Lee-Tai	Pupil Premium Plus	Permanent
Safeguarding Children in Education Officer	James Jordan	DSG Funded	Permanent

As well as their 'core' roles outlined above, the Virtual School team provide consultative support and guidance to schools for Children with a Social Worker. This includes support for behaviour, attendance, mental health & wellbeing and SEND.

Through the expansion of duties, it has enabled the Virtual School to have much stronger engagement in multi-agency panels and boards across Halton. This includes:

- Halton Children and Young People's Safeguarding Partnership Executive Board and all Sub-Groups (Including the Safeguarding Practice Group and the Contextual Safeguarding Strategic Group)

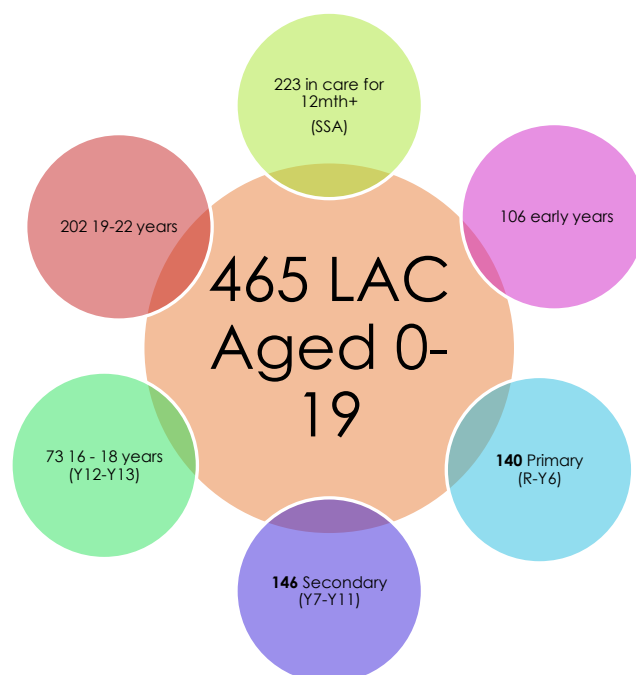
- ‘Team Around the School’ Meetings for those at risk of suspension or extreme persistent absence
- Emotional Health and Wellbeing Panel
- Membership on Halton’s Primary and Secondary Headteachers Networks
- Membership on all National Association of Virtual School Headteacher’s (NAVSH) NW Sub-Groups
- Section 19 panel
- Halton’s Children’s Services Permanence Panel
- Halton’s Children’s Services Resource Panel
- Halton’s Fostering Panel
- Contextual Safeguarding Operational Group
- Children’s Services Improvement Board
- Resource and Placement Panel
- NW 5 Boroughs Post-Looked After Network
- Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) Panel

Our SCIE Officer also attends numerous panels including MARAC, Working Together Meetings for Early Help and is the Chair of all DSL Networks and Workshops.

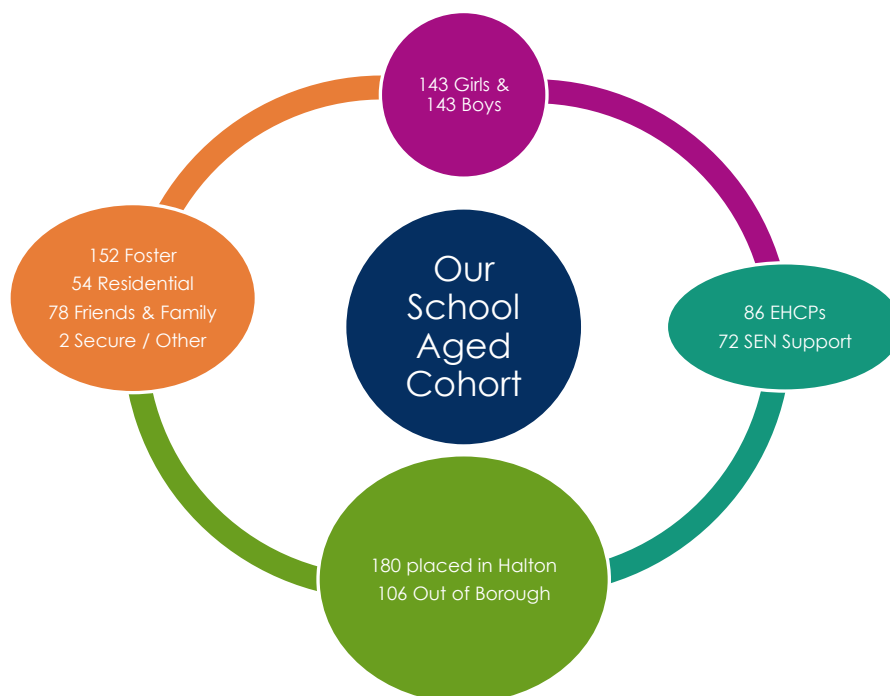
Our Cohort in 2024-2025

Due to the nature of our work, the cohort of children and young people whom we support is continually evolving as children enter care and leave care.

Over the course of the academic year, our cohort of children and young people has included:

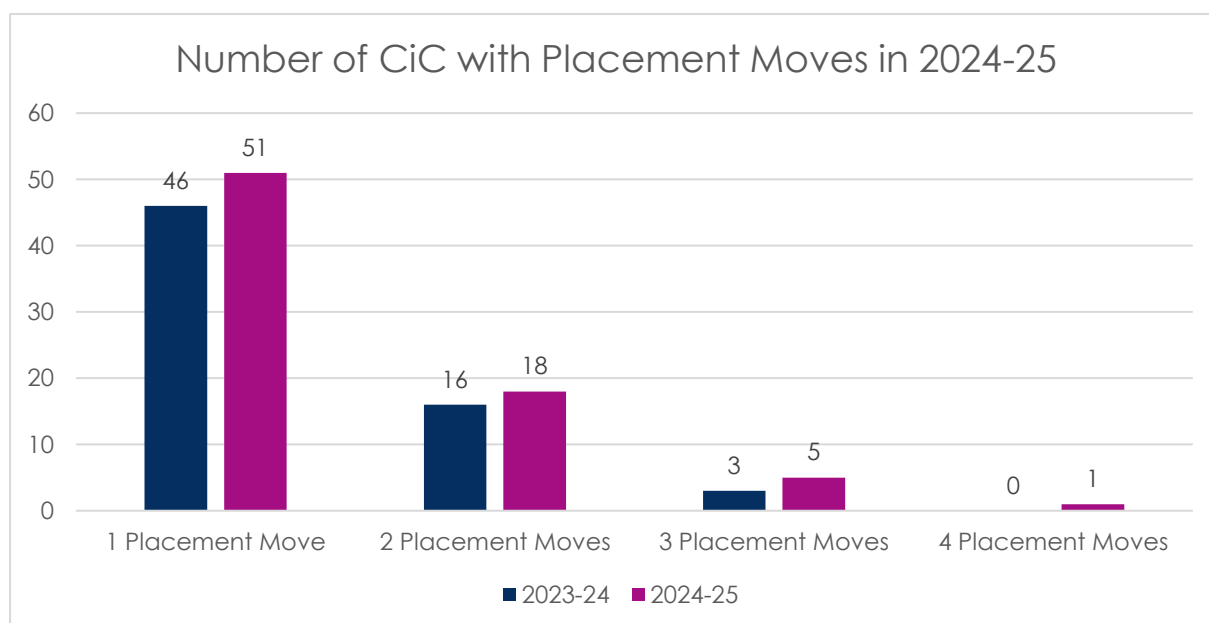


*Cumulated total for 24/25 academic year.
As of 31st August there were 351 children with an episode of care.



Placement moves.

During 2024-25 we continued to see a high number of CYP (Children and Young People) who experienced a placement move with 75 children and young people having 1 or more placement moves (up 65 from 2023-24).



Whenever there is a placement move, we will always work closely with Social Care and Education colleagues to ensure minimal disruption to education. We will challenge where we feel it would have a detrimental impact and also could impact upon them accessing their current education provision, through the Resource Panel held on a weekly basis.

School moves

There were 26 children and young people who had a school move during the academic year 2024-2025 (up from 18 last year) outside of anticipated phase/key stage transfers. All of these moves were completed in a coordinated way, taking into account the pupil voice.

There were 11 young people who have had periods of time not on a school roll, up from 10 in the previous academic year. 7 of these children have an EHCP.

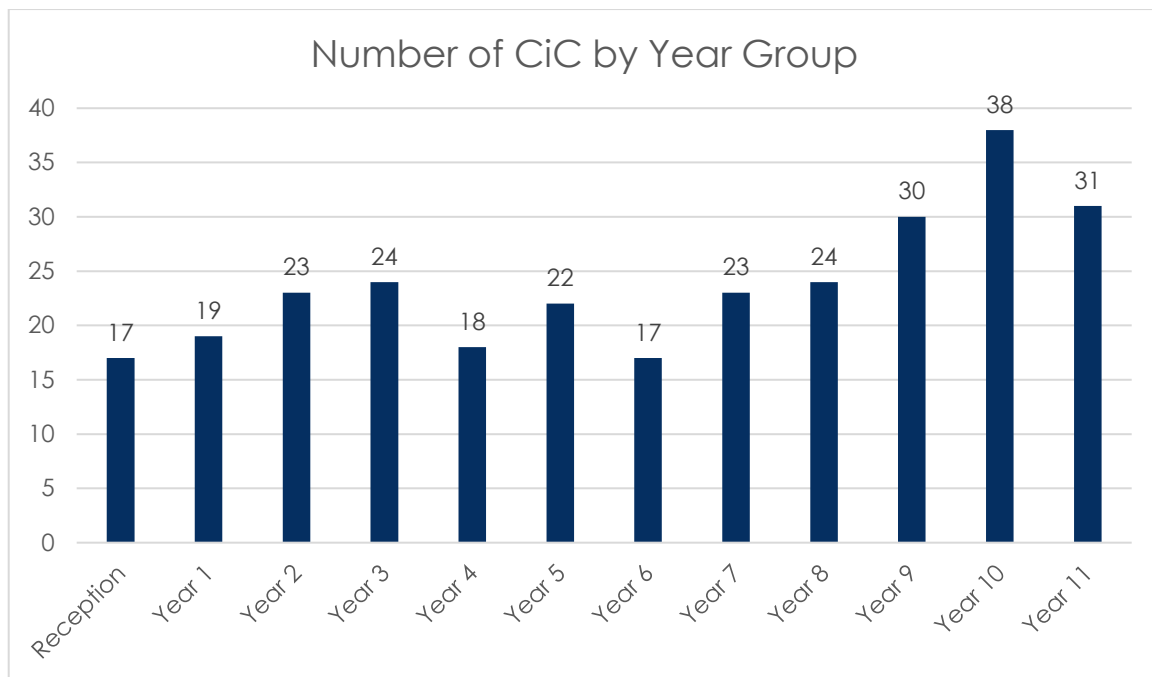
These are two areas in which we work tirelessly to ensure Children and Young People are able to remain on roll at their current school. However, we will also listen closely to their wishes and feelings within PEP meetings and will consider all direct requests where children ask to move schools. This process has been strengthened following feedback and challenge from our Children in Care Council.

A school move will also be considered whenever a child's school receives an Ofsted rating of Requires Improvement or Inadequate, although this does not mean a move will always be in the child's best interests despite the grading.

To ensure that the Virtual School is involved in all decisions to move schools, we have improved the rigour of processes used within Social Care to alert us to potential school move requests, which has impacted upon greater alerting and early intervention and support being actioned by the school.

School Phase

The chart shows a breakdown of children in care by each national curriculum year group for 2024-25. There are clear growth areas in pre-school aged children and within secondary.



New into Care and Discharged from Care

Understandably, our cohort is ever-changing as children come into care and are discharged.

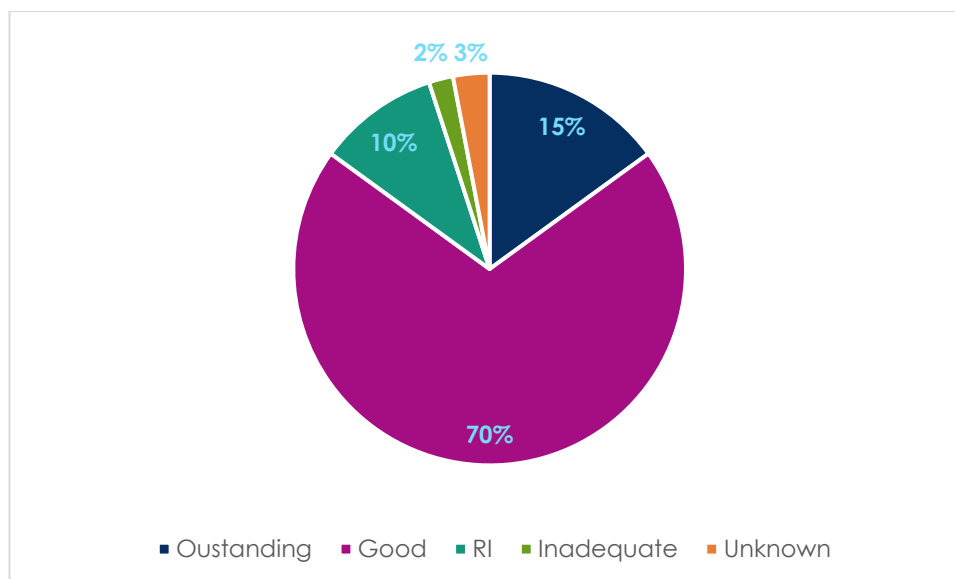
This year, our numbers have increased with 28 discharged and 60 children entering care.

Ofsted Ratings

The statutory guidance 'Promoting the education of looked after children' states that schools judged by Ofsted to be 'Good' or 'Outstanding' should be prioritised for children in care in need of a new school and that, unless there are exceptional, evidence-based reasons, children in care should never be placed in a school judged to be 'Inadequate'.

From September 2024, Ofsted inspections of state-funded schools will no longer include an overall effectiveness judgement. The new scorecard is due in Autumn 2025, therefore, for the purposes of this report, we have included the current Ofsted information that we hold. We will not be reporting on this for the 2025-26 Annual Report.

At the end of the academic year, 85% of Halton's looked after children in Reception to Year 11 attended 'Good' or 'Outstanding' schools which have a rating. This is in comparison to 74% at the end of 2024-25. The 3% 'unknown' are schools which have not yet received an Ofsted rating, such as schools who have recently opened or have converted to an academy. The majority of children who attend Requires Improvement or Inadequate schools were already attending these schools prior to entering care or before the school moved into this category and upon review it was deemed in the child's best interests to remain at the school.



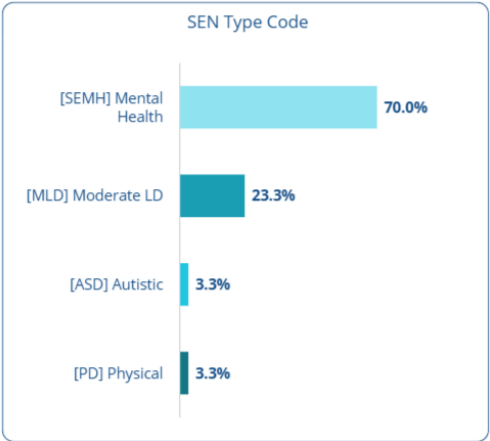
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Children in care are significantly more likely to have additional needs than their non-care experienced peers, and are more likely to have an Education, Health and Care Plan.

As corporate parents, and in line with the ‘Belonging Regulations’, Halton SEND services and the Virtual School have agreed that when a child moves out of borough, the EHCP document will transfer to that authority and will be financially responsibility for our children in care who are living outside of Halton. In these circumstances, the Virtual School team will continue to be the main point of contact for Social Care and will ensure that the authority where the child is placed continues to prioritise our children. The DfE are currently reviewing the ‘Belonging Regulations’ as nationwide, it has become a risk for vulnerable children.

For children that are not in a stable placement, Halton SEN will continue to manage the EHCP. This decision has been made to ensure that the assessment process is not disrupted should the placement breakdown and to minimise the number of local authorities involved in completing the assessment. For all other children placed outside of Halton in stable placements it is the resident authority that undertake the assessment as per the Belongings Regulations.

All EHCPs are reflected within the termly Personal Education Plans, with 70% of current plans having Social, Emotional and Mental Health as the primary category of need this is reflected in the training offered to individual schools and through our training calendar (and use of EP time) to support schools in enabling our children to flourish and thrive.



Academic Outcomes in 2024-2025

Attainment and Progress

Whilst the Virtual School scrutinises and monitors the performance of all children in care to Halton, there is only a statutory requirement to nationally report on educational outcomes for those who have been in care for 12 months or more. The data within this section refers only to those children and young people who meet this statutory requirement.

Due to very small cohort numbers and the fluctuation in children coming into (and leaving) care, caution is needed in interpreting the educational outcomes for Halton children in care. Although the data may indicate differences between previous years the low numbers make it difficult when making comparisons or looking for generalisations across the cohorts as they are very specific to the needs to the individual children and young people.

Instead, through the PEP process we analyse the progress of each individual child and young person based upon their starting points and the targets set for their academic outcomes.

Early Years Foundation Stage

There were 9 young people in the EYFS cohort who had been in care for 12 months or more at the time of assessment.

Of these, 44% achieved a ‘good level of development’ (GLD).

Our Reception cohort data has significantly improved from last year. This year group has been a focus for support from the Virtual School with increased transition support, including learning at home.

GLD	2018-19	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
	29%	60%	30%	27%	44%

Year 1 Phonics

Year 1 Phonics	2018-19	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
	62.5%	33%	57%	50%	62%

Key Stage 1 Outcomes

The KS1 assessments continue to not be statutory, therefore we cannot report on this data.

Key Stage 2 Outcomes

Key Stage 2 Outcomes	2018-19	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Number in Cohort	11	29	18	18	11
Reading	33%	28%	55%	39%	55%
Writing	40%	31%	55%	33%	36%
GPS	54%	24%	72%	28%	45%
Maths	33%	36%	55%	39%	55%
Science	54%	28%	61%	44%	45%
Combined in RWM	33%	28%	44%	28%	45%

Primary Outcomes Analysis

The Primary Outcomes identifies that our children's results at Key Stage 2 have increased compared to previous years, particularly with Reading, GPS, Maths and the Combined. 91% of this year group have an EHCP or an identified area of SEND. 82% of the cohort were educated in borough. Individual pupil progress continues to be measured through PEPS and to ensure even earlier identification of support through targeted plans. This year, the Virtual School have provided additional scrutiny and challenge to settings, ensuring that for these year groups, Pupil Premium + is used with high aspirations. The Primary PEP Lead has ensured attendance at all PEP meetings and care planning meetings for Year 6 children. Three of this cohort have received direct work through the Virtual School focussing on social, emotional and mental health support.

Key Stage 4 Outcomes

	2018-19	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
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Number in Cohort	12	33	20	27	21
9 - 4 English	8%	42%	15%	15%	29%
9 – 4 Maths	33%	30%	15%	4%	19%
9 – 4 English & Maths	8%	24%	0%	4%	14%
9-5 English	0%	27%	5%	4%	5%
9-5 Maths	0%	9%	0%	0%	0%
9 – 5 English & Maths	0%	9%	0%	0%	0%

KS4 Analysis

This year has seen significant improvements in the KS4 outcomes for both English and Maths for those that have followed the GCSE curriculum. Contributing factors include targeted use of PP+ funding alongside SMART targets to support subject specific interventions such as 1:1 tuition (in-person and online) and small group interventions within school. The Virtual School have also encouraged and supported independent learning by providing laptops for revision and coursework. PP+ funding has been utilised to support extra-curricular activities, which offer benefits beyond the academic curriculum and personal development. A key focus this year has been on attendance and highlighting in PEP meetings the negative impact that absence can have on potential educational outcomes. A Virtual School representative has attended all Year 11 PEP meetings and ensured that Post-16 pathway planning is central in discussions.

- 4% of the cohort entered care during KS4.
- 39% of the cohort are also in receipt of an EHCP.
- 78% of the cohort had at least 1 social worker change in the last 12 months.
- 22% of the cohort had at least one placement change during Year 11.
- 0% of the cohort are UASC.
- 30% of the cohort attended out of borough settings.

There are a number of individual success stories which reflect the work of the schools and Virtual School colleagues in supporting the academic progress of our young people. We are continuing to strengthen the work in supporting our 16+ cohort in progressing into education, employment or training from September alongside colleagues within the Local Authorities 14-19 team and supporting with the completion of exam results in the new academic year.

Progress of all Pupils

As well as outcomes, we closely monitor the progress made through the PEP process. Where progress slows or is not on-track based upon their starting points, we work with schools, carers and social workers to use Pupil Premium + in order to provide additional support.

Summer Term 2024-25			
Year	Total No	Number with Expected Progress	% Expected Progress
R	15	9	60%
1	17	10	59%
2	20	17	85%
3	21	14	67%
4	15	10	67%
5	19	16	84%
6	14	14	100%

R	15	9	60%
KS1	37	27	73%
KS2	69	54	78%
TOT	121	90	74%
KS1&2	106	81	76%

Summer Term 2024-25			
Year	Total No	No Ex Pr	% Ex Pr
7	21	14	71%
8	23	19	83%
9	28	21	75%
10	33	14	42%
11	31	17	55%

KS3	72	55	76%
KS4	64	31	48%
TOT	136	86	63%

This data identifies that our cohort have made good or better progress overall in Key Stages 1 and 2 but this dips in Key Stage 4, with our youngest and oldest cohorts. We will therefore feed this into our improvement plan for 2025-26 to further improve the scrutiny and challenge for these year groups to ensure that progress increases in these year groups.

Attendance and Exclusions

Regular school attendance is a key part of giving any child the best possible start in life. However, it is highly likely that a child who comes into care has already missed some time in school, and for some this is a considerable amount. Therefore, it is vital that children in care are supported to attend regularly to mitigate against the impact of previously lost learning, in line with 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance 2024'.

Halton's Virtual School commission a company called 'Welfare Call' to monitor the attendance and exclusions of all Halton children in care regardless of where they are educated. This is done by daily contact with all schools and alternative providers to ensure that attendance is tracked and recorded appropriately and to comply with safeguarding procedures.

Whilst the DfE have determined below 90% attendance to constitute persistent absence, Halton Virtual School monitor both below 90% and 95% attendance, with the latter aspiration target being the benchmark for analysis.

Attendance 2024-25

Average % attendance	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Primary	95%	96%	96%
Secondary	88%	87%	87%
Overall	92%	91%	91%

Attendance of all children in care over the past 8 years

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20 COVID	2020-21 COVID	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Primary	97.1%	96.2%	87.5%	93.3%	95.3%	97%	97%	96%
Secondary	88.7%	88.6%	77.9%	90%	84.6	79%	77%	87%
Overall	92.9%	92.4%	81.9%	90.5%	90%	88%	86%	91%

Where attendance is below 95%, this will need to be explored within the PEP and where a concern is raised (for example if there are unauthorised absences, or a deterioration in school attendance), then this should be reflected in the PEP targets and actions as an area of priority.

Exclusions

This academic year has seen the Virtual School have one permanent exclusion. This was for a significant one-off incident. Education provision was sought immediately and the young person attended the 6th day provision. The young person continues to attend and is engaging with his education. National and regional colleagues have also seen an increase of permanent exclusions for Children in Care.

The Virtual School work closely with school leaders and offer training to all schools in Halton (as part of the expansion of our duties) to remind them of the additional anxieties and challenges that our cohort often face. This will be expanded further at our Autumn conference in September 2025 and throughout the next academic year as we offer additional trauma informed practice training.

Percentage of children in care receiving 1 or more suspension in 2024-25:

	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Primary	0%	1%	1%
Secondary	13%	20%	22%
Overall	3%	11%	12%

2 Primary pupils had 1 or more periods of fixed term suspension:

- 1 was educated out of borough.
- 1 was SEN Support.
- Total days lost learning for Primary children was 8.5 days.

32 Secondary pupils had 1 or more periods of fixed term suspension:

- 59% were educated out of borough.
- 47% were in residential provision.
- 41% had an EHCP.
- Total days lost learning for Secondary age young people was 318.5 days.

In comparison to previous years, there has been a reduction in the number of children in care experiencing suspensions and particularly repeated exclusions. The Virtual School has focussed on raising awareness of the impact of trauma and neglect on children's behaviours leading to more inclusive practice and the positive support provided through the individual child needs led model of Pupil Premium Plus. Targeted school level support will continue to be provided in the next academic year, along with further training on attachment and trauma.

Virtual School Actions and Impact on Exclusions

- Provided support and advice to schools who were experiencing difficulties managing challenging behaviour.
- Continue to attend multi-agency, weekly 'Team Around the School' meetings in all secondary schools for children and young people at risk of suspension. This year has seen the rollout to some primary schools, which the Virtual School have also attended.
- Provided tailored packages of support to high-risk pupils, including mentoring through Insight Mentoring Service.
- Provided attendance support through Pupil Premium Plus.
- Commissioned specialist assessments to support schools to meet the needs of complex children.
- Supported schools to undertake the graduated approach in relation to SEMH needs.
- Supported schools in applying for and securing an EHCP when appropriate.
- Provided ongoing advice to increase awareness and improve practice in meeting the needs of children with attachment difficulties.
- Worked with SEND colleagues to support identification of appropriate education placements.

Accessing Alternative provision

Whilst our overarching goal remains to ensure that all children receive a full-time offer within their registered school, we recognise that Alternative Provision (AP) can play a vital role in supporting those at risk of exclusion or disengagement.

Alternative Provision is strategically incorporated into timetables to:

- Prevent exclusions and promote positive behaviour
- Re-engage learners and improve attendance
- Support transitions into education, employment or training (EET)
- Enable sustained placements in mainstream settings

This academic year has seen a 25% decrease in the number of secondary aged pupils attending Alternative Provision, compared to 2023-24. This reduction reflects:

- Improved early intervention and support within mainstream schools
- Enhanced collaboration between schools and Alternative Provision providers
- A stronger focus on inclusive practices and tailored support

The Bridge School (Halton's PRU) provide an Engagement Programme for Y10 and Y11 young people who require access to alternative provision. This alternative provision is quality assured by The Bridge School.

If a school purchases alternative provision placements for young people with providers who are not part of The Bridge School Engagement Programme, then it is the school's responsibility to quality assure the provision.

Agreement must be gained from the Headteacher of the Virtual School prior to a young person in care being placed on Alternative Provision. This is to ensure that the provision will meet the educational needs of the young person and their long-term aspirations. Scrutiny of the outcomes of these young people is undertaken through the termly Personal Education Plan.

If the provision is via the Engagement Programme the Secondary PEP and Progress Coordinator liaises with The Bridge School to ascertain quality assurance outcomes.

Number of CYP who accessed AP during 24/25	Part Time	Full Time Partial Year	Full Time Whole Year
Primary	1	0	0
Secondary	5	1	0
Overall	6	1	1

Post 16 Access to Education, Employment and Training-

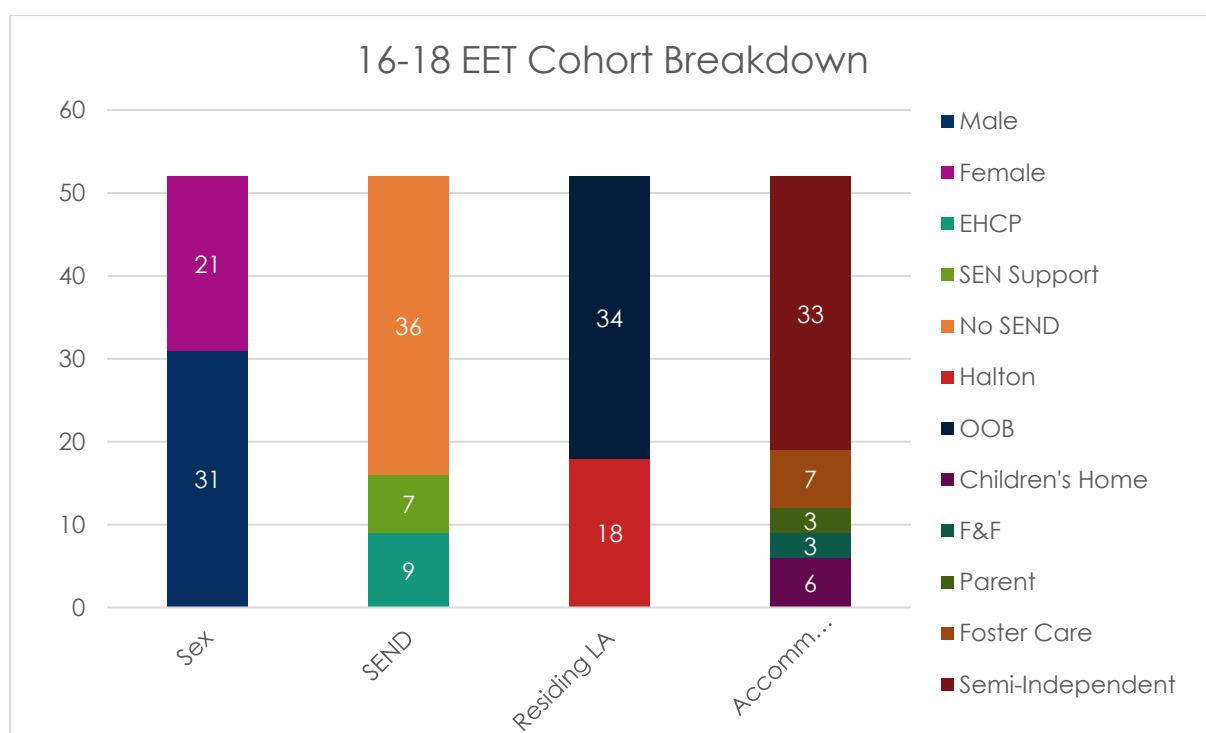
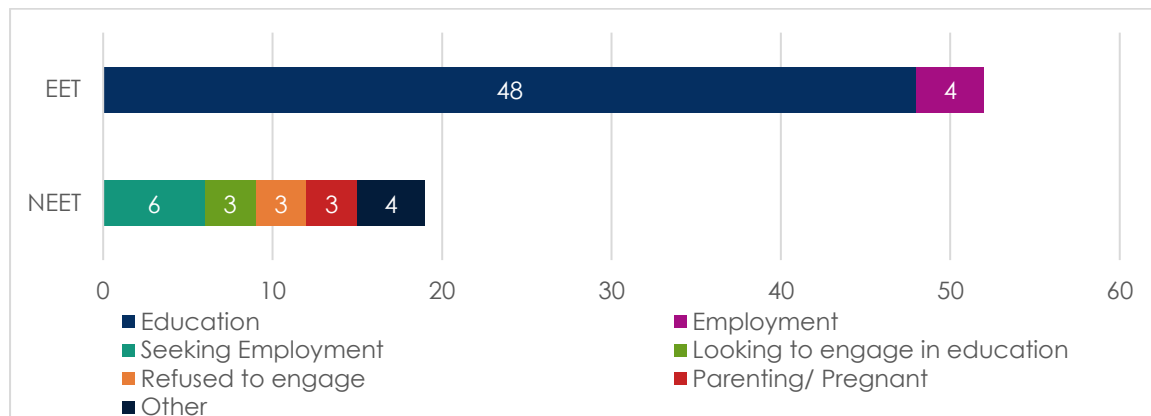
The Virtual School provide support and guidance for all young people in care or care leavers up to the age of 25 around access to Education, Employment and Training (EET), and provide advice and guidance for their social workers or PAs as appropriate.

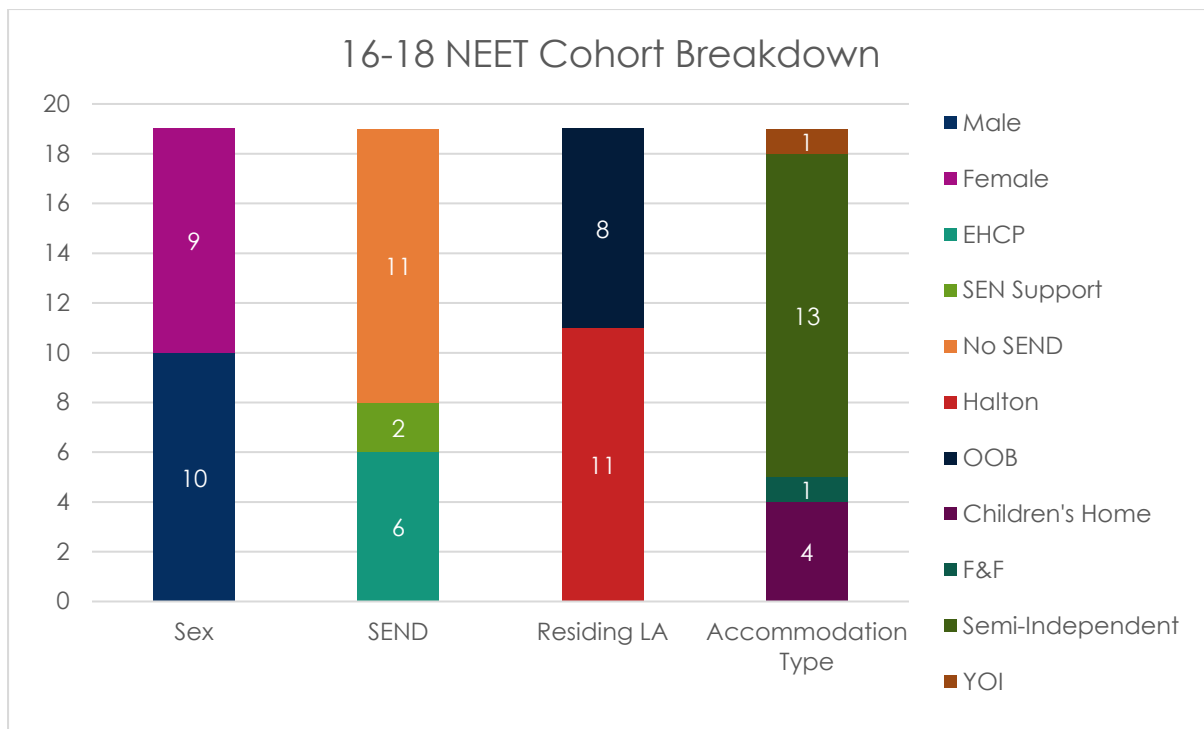
Halton's ILACS inspection in May 2024 highlighted that the Virtual School required more capacity to further develop its good work, in particular around support for our Post 16 cohort. As a result, our KS4 and Post 16 Employability Officer works to improve the engagement of Post 16 young people in care and care leavers in EET and to also ensure that they have access to direct support to explore a range of EET options and achieve good post 16 outcomes. This is through the use of our Post 16 PEP and NEET PEP (Not in Education, Employment or Training) process. The Virtual School has also part funded a Young People Caseworker who sits in the Education to Employment Team, prioritising the Virtual School cohort. We are also in the process of re-structuring the Virtual School to embed a 'college' offer, alongside ensuring sustained capacity within the team.

Six weekly tracking is undertaken with the Education to Employment Team to ensure that there are early alerts for young people who are at risk of becoming NEET as well as those currently NEET. The direct work to re-engage this group, undertaken by the KS4 and Post 16 Employability Officer, is to ensure that the views of the young person are heard and that any barriers are addressed when formulating a plan for re-engagement. This process is monitored through the NEET Panel, attended by relevant stakeholders.

Halton Virtual School liaise closely with the newly appointed Halton Apprenticeship Officer within the Authority to share best practice and ensure that Children in Care and Care Leavers have access to high quality information regarding apprenticeships and also support in the application and recruitment process.

Outcomes for our 16–18-year-old young people in care





OOB = Out of Borough

UASC = Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child

EHCP = Education, Health and Care Plan

YOS = Youth Offending Service Involvement

FC = In Foster Care

The overall cohort is 71 young people of which 73% are in education, employment or training, an increase from 64% this time last year.

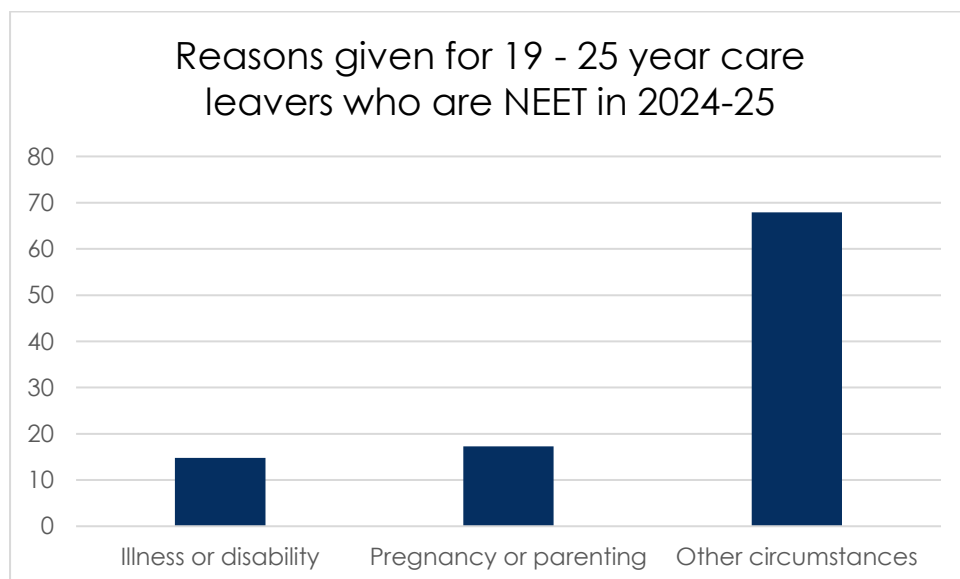
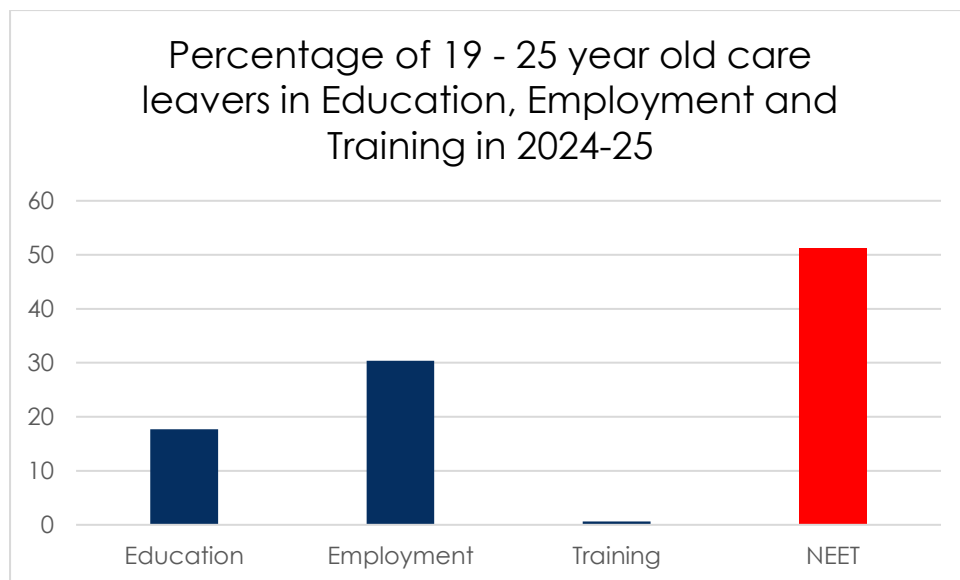
There are 19 young people who are not in education, employment or training within this cohort, down from 31 this time last year.

Halton Virtual School liaise with the Education to Employment Team, referring to Career Connect for bespoke support back into EET via, 1:1 Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG), job search, applications and CV support. For the more vulnerable of the cohort, support and referrals can be tailored to include Disability Employment Advisers, Princes Trust Volunteers, Talent Match, Housing and Complex Youths.

Of the three young people who refused to engage in education, employment or training, all live in Halton. There continues to be a cohort of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) who have very limited English and would therefore struggle accessing mainstream Further Education. For each of these young people, they have an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) support package in place, with a view to then enrolling them at college once their career aspirations are more fully understood.

The NEET PEP alongside a NEET panel with our Social Care and Personal Advisor colleagues to provide further support, actions and accountability for engaging this group of Young People is now embedded in the Virtual School. These are completed by the KS4 & Post 16 Employability Officer for the Virtual School.

Outcomes for our 19- 22-year-old care leavers



Of these 158 young people, 49% are currently accessing education, employment or training (EET) however, there are 51% young people in this cohort who are not in education, employment or training. (NEET).

As a Virtual School, for our Care Leaver NEET cohort, we offer signposting to local services such as Halton People into Jobs, Households into Work and Halton Adult Education Service as well as advice and guidance in supporting our Leaving Care cohort alongside our Personal Advisor colleagues. All data for this cohort is obtained through Eclipse on the Care Leaver report, the context of this cohort is not provided.

Personal Education Plans

The statutory guidance ‘Promoting the education of looked after and previously looked after children’ (February 2018) places a duty on Local Authorities to maintain a Personal Education Plan (PEP) for every child in care in an educational setting up to the end of the school year that s/he turns 18 (Year 13). On coming into care, a PEP must be initiated and completed no later than 20 working days (aspirational goal of within 10) so that it can inform the first statutory review (28 days) and then be reviewed termly from that point on.

For a PEP to be high quality and effective, the guidance states that it should be:

A ‘living’, evolving, comprehensive and enduring record of the child’s experience, progress and achievement (academic and otherwise), and inform any discussion about education during statutory reviews of the child’s wider care plan’ (Para 23 pg. 15)

It is a process that should enable each child or young person to make at least expected progress and fulfil their potential. It should reflect the importance of a personalised approach to learning that meets the identified educational needs of the child, raises aspirations and builds life chances.

The role of the Virtual School is to ensure that there are effective systems in place to ensure Social Workers, Designated Teachers and schools, carers and IROs understand their role and responsibilities in initiating, developing, reviewing and updating the child’s PEP and how they help meet the needs identified in that PEP; ensure that PEPs are up-to-date, effective and high quality and focus on educational outcomes; ensure that all children in care (aged 3 – 18), wherever they are placed, have such a PEP; undertake regular quality assurance of all PEPs.

The Virtual School track on a termly basis the number and quality of PEPs completed. This is then reported in our termly performance reports to our Corporate Parenting Board and Senior Leadership Team.

Statutory Compliance and Quality Assurance

The PEP completion rate has remained consistently high, with a 2% increase compared to last year. The Virtual School is now tracking PEP completion by Social Care Team so any incomplete PEPs can be escalated to Team Managers. All children had a termly PEP meeting, however, the table below highlights those that did not have a completed document on Eclipse. The Virtual School prioritise these children each term and support the setting and Social Worker to ensure there is a quality PEP on the system in the following term.

	Autumn	Spring	Summer	Full Year
Early Years	100%	94%	96%	97%
Primary	98%	99%	99%	99%
Secondary	89%	97%	96%	94%
Post 16	94%	95%	88%	92%
Combined	96%	96%	95%	96%
New into Care in Timescale	70%	71%	86%	76%

Quality Assurance

The Virtual School quality assure every PEP that is completed each term and provide feedback to schools around areas of improvement. Analysis has shown that in Post 16 and Secondary PEPs it is the SMART targets and impact of Pupil Premium Plus sections that continue to need improvement. For EYFS and school age PEPs, the quality of adults working with the child is lacking.

However, the overall percentage of PEPs that are rated as Good or better is increasing each year.

In 2024-25, we continued our internal moderation process that was implemented the previous year. This ensures consistency across schools, PEP co-ordinators and age ranges. This year we have seen a reduction in the number of 'Red' PEPs, reflecting the improvement in the quality of the PEP document. We continue to provide statutory training to settings, social care and foster carers on their roles and responsibilities on completing a quality PEP document. Following on from our successful internal moderation process, we now moderate as a North West regional team. This ensures that we are in line with our neighbouring authorities and sets a benchmark for the quality assurance process.

Green or Gold PEPS	Autumn	Spring	Summer	Full Year
Early Years	68%	70%	56%	65%
Primary	82%	71%	71%	75%
Secondary	57%	52%	54%	54%
Post 16	84%	91%	83%	86%
Combined	72%	67%	64%	67%

Our PEP policy and supporting documents expand upon what 'makes an effective (green or gold) PEP.

Pupil Premium Plus and Wider Funding

This year, the total grant allocated for Halton was £838,567.

65% (£576,164) was spent directly on the children and young people to improve their educational outcomes through distributed payments to schools and education provision, an increase from 51% in 2023-24.

	2021 - 22	2022- 23	2023-24	2024-25
PEP Allocation	27%	33%	44%	49%
Direct YP Support	19%	14%	7%	16%
Training	5%	2%	2%	2%
Centrally Retained	49%	51%	47%	33%

The centrally retained portion is for the attendance service the Virtual School commission, dedicated Education Psychology time (and the training they deliver), speech and language support (from 24/25), purchasing of Boxall Profile licences, and for staff within the Virtual School. It is important to note that this central allocation is vital to ensuring that we are able to track the educational outcomes and also provide support for both schools and children in care.

During the 24/25 academic year, we have benchmarked the spending of PP+ in comparison to other LAs and Virtual Schools and developed a greater measurement of impact of spending. This has informed the next steps regarding the Virtual School team restructure and ensured that settings are improving pupil outcomes.

Schools use the funding allocated through the PEPs to commission support themselves (including tuition, nurture and emotional literacy support, and access to additional interventions), to enhance the curriculum, offer opportunities to nurture talents, or support them in their talents and academic interests.

Post Looked After Children

For children who were previously looked-after but left care via a formal route such as adoption or a Special Guardianship Order, the Virtual School's duty is to provide advice and information to professionals and parents. We do not have corporate parenting responsibility for these children so do not complete direct work with them or case hold, we offer advice and guidance on all aspects of education and specific training for schools on supporting the needs of these children.

330 school age pupils known to be previously looked after are currently attending Halton schools.

Children and young people who have experienced early life trauma can continue to experience a range of challenges in school. We understand the long-term impact of trauma, and this informs the support and guidance we give to parents, carers and professionals who live and work with previously looked after children.

Additionally, Halton works very closely within a sub region of other Virtual Schools, to upskill staff and share good practice and resources. The quality of Halton Virtual School resources has been recognised

and distributed to all schools in the borough, as well as representing a constant presence on the Virtual Schools website with its very own dedicated 'Children Who Were Previously Looked After' page.

Halton Virtual School has worked hard at developing much stronger departmental links across Children's Services and particularly with Social Care. This has taken the form of training sessions, 'drop-ins' and support at school exclusion meetings.

Areas of Celebration

- Strengthening support for all vulnerable cohorts such as Children with a Social Worker and Kinship Carers.
- Working in collaboration with Together for Adoption (TfA).
- Providing advice and support to parents and schools on suspensions and exclusions, SEND and the EHCP process, including model template letters and communications for schools and settings to communicate effectively with parents.
- Delivery of educational support 'coffee morning' surgeries for adoptive parents and SGO carers (as well as Kinship carers) connected to Halton.
- Further development of strong interpersonal relationships with DTs throughout the borough ensuring excellent collaboration in multi-agency responses to areas of need in both school and the home as well as in areas such as admissions and transitions.
- Improved website containing an updated directory of services and offer for parents / carers of previously looked after children.
- Presence at designated teacher meetings (in and out of borough) providing updates regarding national changes to the provision for previously looked after children and specific guidance concerning support and funding available for schools.
- Attendance and offers of support at multi agency meetings.
- Increased number of enquiries and requests for support, information and advice from parents/carers, schools and social work colleagues.
- Initial consultations with the Leaving Care Team ensuring training links, local services and third party layers of support are smoothly communicated.
- A directory of services for previously looked after children signposting local authority and independent providers' services.
- Proposed training programme beginning with 'teenagers and the adoption journey' session provided by Louise Bomber in cooperation with four other local authority partners.
- Development of training resources for social workers pertaining to both previously looked after children and the remit of the Virtual School.
- Membership of the North west regional network for children with a social worker providing inter-local authority support.

Areas of Development and Targets for 2025 – 2026

- Use of census data to challenge schools on their use of pupil premium plus for previously looked after.
- Closer work with Fostering department (and other organisations) to develop joint training and support for kinship carers.
- Extension of Training: Further Previously Looked after Training for adoptive parents, SGO and Kinship carers in the Spring and Summer Terms (2026) following Louise Bomber in Autumn 2025 focussing upon 'Understanding SEND', 'Post 16 Options', and 'Supporting Reading in the Early Years'.
- In 2025 – 26 academic year we will be further developing this offer to include Kinship carers in line with statutory guidance.
- Delivery of workshops to social care teams regarding the remit of the Virtual School and support and funding criteria for children previously looked after.
- Deployment of survey and collation of data from school regarding what further areas of support they require for their cohort of previously looked after children.
- Development of an offer with the Leaving Care Team.

Children with a Social Worker (CWSW)

Over the past academic year, significant progress has been made in strengthening relationships and raising the profile of education for children with a social worker. This has been achieved through close collaboration with education settings, Social Workers, and other Local Authority teams. Monthly reporting mechanisms have been established to monitor the attendance status for this cohort, providing valuable data that informs planning and supervision by both education and social care managers.

Advice and guidance has been provided in relation to many children across all phases of education who are supported under Child in Need or Child Protection plans. Through active participation in panels and professional networks, barriers to education for individual young people have been identified and resolved. This has contributed to an enhanced focus on promoting education and attendance within statutory plans. Child in Need and Child Protection plans now contain specific mandatory fields to record specific education information, covering areas such as attendance, NEET status, transitions, and SEND, ensuring that education remains a central consideration in multi-agency planning.

In 2025-26, we will focus on further enhancing the strategic oversight and operational delivery of education for children with a social worker. This includes working collaboratively with other Local Authority teams to expand the scope and depth of reporting, ensuring that data is both comprehensive and actionable. Continued engagement with education and social care service managers will be essential to embed education and attendance considerations into all aspects of service planning and supervision. Additionally, a further dip sampling exercise will be undertaken, specifically examining how education is reflected within Child in Need and Child Protection plans. This will help identify areas of good practice and opportunities for improvement, ensuring that education remains a central focus in multi-agency safeguarding efforts.

We have continued to play an active role in the 'Team Around the School' model for children at risk of exclusion within 100% of our secondary schools. We have also enhanced our presence on key multi-agency groups to support those at risk of exploitation.

Our Safeguarding Children in Education Officer also provides active support to schools relating to escalations, case support and training for DSLs.

Training and Development

During 2024-25, the Virtual School delivered training and hosted network meetings to 301 delegates from across 249 Schools. This year, we continued to invite all social care and fostering colleagues to all of our training sessions.

Training and support were provided in relation to four key aims this year, to ensure we get our core business to the highest standard possible, especially following the increased expectations around what constitutes a 'good' PEP:

- New to the Role of Designated Teacher
- Multi-agency working
- Inclusive environments
- Termly DT Network Meetings

Our next Virtual School Conference for Safeguarding Leads, Designated Teachers, Headteacher and Social Care takes place on 22nd October 2025 with over 150 delegates expected to join us for what is sure to be a fantastic day's professional development!

Virtual School Team Training

This year, the Virtual School team have accessed CPD focussing on attachment and trauma. The team have attended seven sessions throughout the academic year to become qualified to deliver training to settings, Social Workers and colleagues across the authority on how to support our children who have had adverse childhood experiences. The Early Years Support Worker is now trained to deliver PEEP Training and 'Tots Talking' Speech and Language Programme. One of our PEP Leads has begun training in 'Thrive' to bring the Virtual School in line with our colleagues in school settings. This will mean that all of our Children in Care, regardless of where they live, will be supported with a Thrive approach. The Headteacher completed Peer Reviewer training in November 2024 and is now qualified to undertake Peer Reviews of Virtual Schools. The Headteacher of the Virtual School has also completed the NPQH qualification in April 2025.

Additional learning and literacy support

Halton Virtual School provides a high level of 'outside the classroom' educational support for our children and young people in care.

The Virtual School coordinate additional one-to-one tuition for any Halton child in care who requests support with a subject, regardless of where they are educated or living. The tutors are always qualified teachers and subject specialists and provide regular tuition reports. Whilst our original 1:1 tuition offer has been face to face, we have responded to pupil voice and moved to provide online tuition where preferred.

In partnership with a local bookshop (The Curiosity Book shop) the Virtual School send an individualised book parcel to each identified child in their placement on a half termly basis. The children are identified through analysis of the PEP outcomes and also all Reception age children receive them. The parcels are tailored to the child's interests and their reading and writing levels. The aims of the book parcels are to encourage a love of reading at home; and improve reading ages and vocabulary development.

The Virtual School also has a yearly subscription to Storytime Magazine which is sent out each month to identified children in Key Stage 1 and when appropriate to some Key Stage 2 children. The magazines are brightly illustrated and have short stories. The aim of the magazines are to encourage a love of reading at home particularly for those who struggle accessing a book and to improve reading age and vocabulary development. 42 children have had the Storytime magazine this year.

The Virtual School website (www.myvirtualschool.org) has been enhanced and regularly updated with curriculum links particularly Maths and English and other subjects; resources to support learning at home; other activities to support carers in keeping children and young people engaged in their learning such as virtual tours of museums, cross curricular activities, coding projects, arts & craft ideas, fun ideas from famous authors etc. A new section with ideas and resources to support Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing has also added.

This year, we have commissioned mentoring support for an identified cohort of young people through Insight Mentoring. In addition to this, we are working in partnership with Together Trust to deliver further commissioned services aimed at enhancing the support available to children in care, whilst signposting settings to wider services that are available to improve educational outcomes and engagement. These services are designed to provide consistent, targeted interventions that address individual needs and promote positive outcomes for the cohort.

2024 – 2025 Virtual School Action Plan

A summary of our Action Plan for the previous academic year

Objective	Action to reach objective	Progress	Strengths, Risks & RAG Rating
To develop a Halton Virtual School Reading Strategy.	Develop a Virtual School reading survey to identify themes and trends in our schools, placements and to understand the views of our children. Develop a training plan to raise educational outcomes in reading. Strengthen our Reading support offer. Develop the analysis of the data we collect around reading age and assessments. Close the attainment gap between Halton children in care and their non-care peers through termly progress support and challenge meetings.	Data collection from Welfare Call to give baseline figures for reading ability (ages Y1-Y11) Meeting with 'happy home learning' on 'Reading Champions' project supporting CP and CIN children 'Reading Heroes' – pilot programme application made. Development of speech and language 'progress and action' cards for 0-5 year olds. To be used by Social Workers and other professionals to identify early concerns and be proactive in accessing support for children and families, and opening up communication between professionals. This is being developed with Speech and Language UK and will impact on future reading abilities/skills. Primary settings approached for example reading policies	Reading Programme of Support created. Funding for additional reading resources has been successful. New training offer for Foster Carers and parents. Chronological reading age data from Welfare Call captured on spreadsheet

		Secondary settings approached for example reading policies Meeting with The Literacy Company 25th Nov 2025 Reading Fluency training via English Hub – SR to attend. Book parcels continue to be sent to reception age children and a targeted cohort. Story time magazine to an identified cohort in primary Meeting with Catch-up Literacy	
Develop the Virtual School College	Ensure all marketing materials and website outlines the clear offer of the Virtual School and College Strengthen and develop the NEET Panel to ensure Social Care colleagues have the skills to support our young people into education, training, or employment. Halton to adopt Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic. Increase capacity within The Virtual School to widen our current offer.	Virtual School College is currently being developed with the authorities design team: Development of care leaver aspiration form to support NEET panel. Shared with leaving care team. Training programme developed for the academic year including VS conference that took place on 18th Sept 2024.	Development of aspiration form has been created; more oversight of need and aspiration to formulate targeted provisions for care leavers. Regular attendance at HEP meeting is garnering further opportunities for care leavers to engage in EET. Appointment of Halton Apprenticeship Officer. LCR Youth Guarantee Trailblazer (YGT) Programme:

	Continue to improve the completion and quality of Post 16 PEPs and NEET PEPs. Embed the formalised Virtual School offer of support for all Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) entering Halton's care.	Development session delivered to Halton's fostering panel and fostering team on 10th Sept 2024. September 2024 Discussions between Halton VS and DCS around developing an Apprenticeship and Work Experience Placement offer from Halton BC for our Care Experienced cohort. HBC agree to ring fence apprenticeship opportunity for Care Experienced YP Post 18 NEET panel held Information and signposting shared with CL managers who will cascade this to PAs.	Support for care experienced young people including development of best practice. Virtual school currently undertaking a restructure to provide further capacity and oversight in this area. PEP completion and quality have increased. Offer has now been created to support USAC children who are not accessing education.
Raise attendance and reduce the number of exclusions for all Children in Care	Strengthen training offer for all adults working with vulnerable children Develop the use of data to ensure that our analysis is robust and identifies trends early. Provide thorough weekly analysis of attendance of all school aged looked after children.	Team around the school meetings: Primary – monthly by invitation (drop-ins). Secondary – Settings to book a preferred date in. Programme continuing academic year 2024-2025. EBSNA – discussed at team around the school meetings for advice and support.	Weekly attendance tracking and RAG rating Effective TAS meetings reducing exclusions Attendance and inclusion training delivered

	Relaunch Halton Virtual School attendance policy. Upskill social care colleagues in understanding and improving school attendance. Complete a Peer review of PP+ Develop commissioned services offer to meet need.	TAS has proved highly successful in reducing potential permanent exclusions for those marked as 'at risk' of Permanent Exclusion. Comprehensive data list of numbers of 'previously looked after children / Young People' collected for all schools within Halton and OOB. Early Years attendance is tracked on PEP data document each term. Any concerns are highlighted, discussed and actions put into place through a multi-agency arrangement. Request Post-16 data to be RAG rated by Welfare Call. Primary, Secondary attendance report from Welfare Call (WFC2) – Attendance analysis with RAG ratings. Termly meetings – DB/GD to discuss attendance/exclusion concerns. Dates are arranged. Breakdown of permanent exclusions and suspensions for children in care. Weekly data from LA data team.	Multi-agency collaboration
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		Attendance and Inclusion Training has been provided by AC Education. VS attendance policy Social Care support re: attendance : documents and workshop materials to support this. Post 16 attendance reported weekly from welfare call. Half termly analysis from the VS. Post-16 welfare call email weekly attendance document to DB/IW. Figures then RAG rated by Post 16 Team and multi-agency approach to concerns raised.	
Enhance the Virtual School offer for Vulnerable groups, including Kinship, Children with a Social Worker, Post-Looked After & UASC cohort.	Support for those with SEND to get the right support when it is needed including access to our new S&L service and our educational psychologist. New flightpath support package for all children leaving care. Refinement and rolling out to schools of PEP style document for children formerly in care	Kinship and Children with a Social Worker 'educational package' for social workers developed and facilitated (Training and resources completed and ready for delivery). To be facilitated at Social Worker Forum. Kinship and Children with a Social Worker Virtual School Website Page Developed	On-going area for development due to new statutory duties being released in 2025-26 by the DFE, however, all areas for 2024-25 have been completed with progress made in this area. Comprehensive training and resources for social workers Flightpath support package implemented

	Continue to develop the Kinship and Children with a Social Worker offer Strengthen EAL offer. In collaboration with the Social Work Academy, develop an Education Induction and Orientation Programme for all new staff that work with vulnerable children.	Flightpath support package for children and young people leaving care shared with discharge team lead Sarah Darley. (P-lac) New 5 Boroughs Plan revamped for 2024-2025 including bespoke Webinar training from Louise Bomber to be rolled out academic year 2025-26. Monthly Support Group Meetings for adopters and special guardians extended to those offering kinship care. CwSW / Kinship webpage developed with VS remit and resources. Formalised UASC offer in place: website updated to reflect this situation. On entering care, all UASCs will receive a digital laptop to assist in their learning. Those who do not gain a formal educational ESOL place will have access to the online Flash Academy app to develop knowledge and acquisition of the English language. Development of social work academy in developing education orientation to be included as part of induction, this is ready to be launched when academy give the go ahead.	
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Our Plans for 2025-2026

A summary of our plans for this academic year can be found below. These are expanded within our delivery plan for the academic year, including timescales, success measures and identified actions.

To increase the number of children that are school ready and reach GLD by the end of Reception.

- Develop the training offer for Social Workers and Carers of children aged 0-5
- Enhance multiagency working with the Early Years Team and Family Hubs
- Strengthen data collection throughout the academic year
- Review effective use of PP+ for 3-6 year olds and how impact is measured

To reduce the attainment & progress gap for Children in Care compared to their non cared for peers

- Embed Halton Virtual School Attendance policy
- Embed the effective use of attendance and exclusions data and develop targeted support for professionals, including Social Workers, Foster Carers and Residential placements
- Rollout of Halton Virtual School's Reading support programme
- Develop 'Celebration & Recognition' for Children in Care to Halton Virtual School
- Increase the number of good or better PEPs across all age groups

To embed the Virtual School offer for vulnerable groups

- Development of social, emotional and mental health support through the Thrive approach
- Strengthen attendance data analysis for Children with a Social Worker
- Embed Kinship offer
- Strengthen multiagency working across education and social care
- Development of Education Support Practitioners to support early intervention and support

To embed the Virtual College offer and reduce the number of NEET 16-18 year olds

- Strengthen governance of NEET panel
- Develop multiagency approach to NEET PEPs.
- Launch of Virtual School & College logo
- Develop cross authority links for Post 16 education sufficiency

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

DATE: 10 November 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director of Children' Services

PORTFOLIO: Children Young People and Families

SUBJECT: School Performance Outcomes 2025

WARD(S) Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Following the publication of validated KS4 school performance data on 16th October 2025, a presentation will be shared on the performance outcomes for schools across Halton at the end of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), and Key Stages 2, 4 and 5. Provisional data sets will be necessary for EYFS and Key Stage 5 as DfE dates for validated data are set for November and December for these stages, but no dates have, as yet, been confirmed.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) the outcomes presented are noted; and**
2) the Board determines actions following performance outcomes.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 A presentation will be given during the meeting to share the performance outcomes, following the publication of validated data prior to the meeting.
- 3.2 National Data for Key Stage 2 can be located here [Key stage 2 attainment, Academic year 2024/25 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)
- 3.3 Once published, Key Stage 4 data can be located here [Key stage 4 performance, Academic year 2023/24 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)
- 3.4 Individual School performance, once published for 2025 can be found her [Compare the performance of schools and colleges in England - GOV.UK](#)

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The performance outcomes will inform the delivery plans for the 2025-26 academic year, which will work towards the objectives within the Children and Young People Strategy 2024-27.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Budgetary decisions over 2025-2027 will be informed by the priorities identified within the performance outcomes, alongside the work within the DfE's Best Start for Life Strategy.

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

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

The work in schools to improve performance outcomes, including removing barriers to learning, is informed by Halton's Children and Young Peoples Plan and includes all partners across the borough.

6.2 **Building a Strong, Sustainable Economy**

The best possible educational outcomes achieved by our children, the stronger the future work force for Halton

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

The educational outcomes for our children and young people is influenced by the quality of education provided within each of our schools and reflects the key priorities within the Children and Young Peoples Plan 2025-2027.

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

The performance data takes into account all children and young people across the borough and the achievements made based upon their starting points.

6.5 **Working Towards a Greener Future**

None

6.6 **Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

None

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

- 7.1 Progress against each of the priorities identified within the presentation will be tracked and inform future reports to the Policy & Performance Board.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

- 8.1 None raised.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None identified.

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

10.1 None under the meaning of the Act.