



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

**Monday, 19 January 2026 at 6.30 p.m.
Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn**

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

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

Part I

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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, 10 November 2025 in the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Logan (Chair), Goodall (Vice-Chair), Baker, Fry, Jones, P. Lloyd Jones, Ratcliffe and Ryan

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Dourley and C. Plumpton Walsh

Absence declared on Council business: None.

Officers present: K. Appleton, J. Dunning, P. France, B. Holmes, G. Prince, and I. Moorhouse.

Also in attendance: S. Turner (Observing) and Councillor T. McIrney in accordance with Standing Order Number 33.

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

	<i>Action</i>
CYP22 MINUTES	<p>The Minutes of the meeting held on the 8th September 2025 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.</p>
CYP23 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME	<p>It was confirmed that no public questions had been received.</p>
CYP24 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES	<p>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.</p> <p>It was confirmed that the report on Home to School Transport for SEND children will go to Executive Board in November. Even though the PPB was not referenced in the report, the Portfolio Holder stated that he would notify Executive Board that the recommendations in the report</p>

came from the PPB.

CYP25 CHILDREN'S SERVICES DIRECTORATE QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT (Q2 2025/26)

The Board received the performance management report for Quarter 2 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.

There had been an increased attendance in the Family Engagement Hub and the Edge of Care Service successfully reducing residential placements. More children were placed in care which raised the number to 384 but this number included care leavers. Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) timeliness was above the national average and timeliness had improved with EHCP annual reviews.

The new Ofsted framework had been launched, and secondary school standings had increased above 71% for good or outstanding Ofsted grading. There had been a significant drop in exclusions and suspensions and attendance in mainstream schools but attendance at the PRU (Pupil Referral Unit) had improved.

164 staff members had received training through the Social Work Academy. There had been a reduction in using agency staff due to successful recruitment of agency workers by the Council. There had been an increase in permanent staff off long-term sick.

The Council struggled to recruit foster carers, but this was a national problem. To mitigate this, a new App had been launched called 'Tell A Friend' which had some success but did not cover sufficiency needs.

Schools were contacted to see if they would be interested in expanding their resource provision for SEND pupils and at least six schools expressed an interest in this. Consultations will be had with these schools, their

communities and the DfE around this. Ashley High School will have four new classrooms built on site for their pupils by September 2026 and Brookfields School was also looking to expand their provision. Officers wanted to focus on SEND provision being expanded in secondary schools as this was where the demand was.

Prior to the meeting, several members of the Board received a presentation on the Youth Trailblazer Project (YTP) for care leavers and NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) young people. The project's purpose was to help young people access employment or education and it utilised money from Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCR).

For the future, officers would focus on reducing care demand, stabilising fostering provision, and helping create a care home with non-for-profit organisations.

It was noted that there was no alternative building for the PRU to move to and there were no funds available to build a new PRU. This was a priority for the Council's Strategic Asset Plan. Officers were working with the Headteacher of the PRU to ensure that they received all the provisions needed to educate the pupils there. This included a incentivising curriculum and well-trained teachers. The PRU enhanced its breakfast club provision, and it now had 10 children attending on average daily. To improve attendance, the PRU had a minibus to pick up pupils so they would not need to rely on public transport.

In terms of funding, LCR would like to continue doing NEET work at a local level so possible delays with Central Government could be avoided.

Officers had worked hard to reduce delays with court hearings regarding SGOs (Special Guardianship Orders). They previously took up to two years but recently cases had been resolved in less than three months. Work had been done to reduce the amount of time that C2 applications (an application in existing court proceedings relating to children) took due to the rising number of children in care. Legal orders caused delays with moving children out of foster placements onto SGOs. Delays for court hearings could take up to four and a half months.

Discussions were had with a national provider regarding getting children to school, but funding was needed from the DfE (Department of Education) to do this. This scheme would improve student attendance and academic

attainment for when they are in care.

The following additional information was provided in response to Member's questions:

- A court order would be required to remove a child from their home. However, if a child was deemed to be at immediate risk, then the police would administer a police protection order, or an emergency protection order could be issued. If there were court delays, then a Section 20 could be discussed with the child's parent or guardian as this would mean the child is voluntarily put into care.
- Cost Placement Panels will report to Corporate Parenting Board as part of the new structure. Historically, they reported to the Head of Children's Services.
- Debts from placements had increased due to residential placement costs increasing and there not being enough in-house foster carers. This was being addressed through the DCS Forum.
- The Board noted that officers worked hard to try to mitigate rising residential placement costs for out of borough placements, but Central Government would need to help all local authorities resolve this issue as it was a national issue.
- Officers confirmed that risk assessments were put in place to protect children and teachers when violent incidents happened in school. The children and school staff involved in any reported incidents were safe and positive feedback had been received from the headteachers of schools where these incidents happened.
- JUNO is a non-for-profit organisation who LCR partnered with to purchase properties and turn them into in-borough care homes. They had recently bought one property in Halton and planned to purchase two more. There will be eight placements by 2027. It was noted that large numbers at residential homes would not be accepted by Ofsted

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CYP26 QUARTERLY REPORT FROM THE HALTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP

The Board considered the Quarterly Report from the Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership. The report detailed the achievements of the Partnership and how it

addressed areas for improvement that were identified in the Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) Business Plan. The key priorities for development or improvement were agreed by strategic leaders and included in the HSCP Business Plan 2024-27.

Progress had been made against the Council's priorities and the work done by the multi-agency strategic group. The Partnership had three goals: improve the quality and timeliness of practices regarding neglect; safeguarding children from violence and exploitation; and protecting children as victims of domestic abuse.

Weekly safeguarding meetings were held regarding children who were identified as high risk and monthly operational meetings were held to discuss concerning trends, for example, the rise in ketamine use. The Partnership had formed a robust response to this including awareness activities.

A mock inspection was undertaken for child domestic abuse victims, and this showed that insufficient services were in place. Therefore, awareness raising undertaken with different age groups and schools were being informed in a timelier matter when incidents happened so they could support the child in their school who were affected.

Work had done to train frontline practitioners and improve attendance for high-risk children. Work needed to be done to improve transitional safeguarding between child and adult social care.

The Board praised the work done by the Partnership.

The following additional information was provided in response to Member's questions:

- Following some investigation work, officers found a high correlation between poverty and neglect for children. Therefore, they planned to tackle the root cause of this.
- As teenage pregnancy was a lot higher in Halton than the national average, the health and education sub-boards will investigate this imminently.
- Drug usage had reduced amongst young people following the success of workshops focusing on this.
- Schools recently received a new toolkit to ensure that they were being 'inclusive by design'. The toolkit will be highlighted through numerous workshops and training.

- It was confirmed that the Council adopted the Joseph Rowntree definition of poverty regarding its children.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CYP27 HALTON'S VIRTUAL SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25

The Board considered the Virtual School Annual Report 2024-25 which covered the educational outcomes and achievement for Halton's Children in Care, and the school's wider work across children's services.

The school was going through a restructure which was planned for January 2026 due to the increased number of children coming into care. The school's priorities were a new reading support programme, a Virtual School College to help NEET care experienced young people, improving attendance and reducing exclusions, and supporting vulnerable groups.

75 children moved placements, and 26 children moved school, but these moves were structured and planned. Exam results were good, attendance had improved, and exclusions and suspensions had reduced. 73% of year 12 and 13 pupils were in further education or employment.

There had been an increased number of delegates attending training and the training offer for parents and foster carers had been increased.

Work was planned to ensure that new school starters were ready for school and officers were keen for children in care and with social workers, to perform as well as children not in care. More support around maths was planned as this was a subject that pupils struggled with.

It was planned that six new members of staff will join the school, and they will help support the physical schools that virtual school pupils attended and their families.

The following additional information was provided in response to Member's questions:

- Every local authority must have a virtual school which would oversee the education outcomes for children in care.
- Children still attend a physical school and could go to a school anywhere in the country, but they must be a Halton child to be monitored by the virtual school.

- The Virtual School worked closely with the YTP (Youth Trailblazer Project), and they put plans in place together for young people in the virtual school.
- The Board will receive a full report on NEET children at the meeting in January 2026. The Board requested that this report include overlaps with the YTP.
- Officers linked in with the Literacy Trust and hosted three events for parents and carers to promote reading for pleasure to children. They will review its courses.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CYP28 SCHOOL PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES 2025

The Board considered a presentation on the performance outcomes for schools across Halton at the end of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), and Key Stages 2, 4 and 5. In the accompanying presentation it was noted that:

- There were no progress measures for the primary stage or transition stages due to Covid-19 as the current Year 7's did not sit exams in Year 2 and the current Year 11's did not sit exams in Year 6.
- Halton had a higher percentage of EHCP, SEND, and children that received free school meals compared to the national average.
- Early Year profiles which are done at the end of reception, increased in 'good level of development' nationally and in Halton to 68% and 62% respectively.
- The performance of SEND children and children with EHCPs decreased but children who received free school meals improved in their academic performance and were above the national average.
- 76% of pupils in Halton passed their phonics exam in Year 1 compared to 80% nationally.
- 69% of children listed as 'most vulnerable' achieved their expected standard compared to 67% nationally.
- Halton matched the national average in reading, writing and maths as a combined score but were below the national average at 'greater depth'.
- More 'disadvantaged children' in Halton scored 2% higher than the national average in reading, writing and maths.
- In 2025, Halton pupils with EHCP pupils outperformed the national average for EHCP pupils.
- Halton's Key Stage 4 results were not as good as its Key Stage 2 results, and they were below the national average but there was visible improvement 'at pace' after a drop the previous year.

- In terms of 'Level 8' attainment for GCSE results, this had improved so Halton was closing the gap with the national average.
- English and maths results were at pre-pandemic performance levels.
- There was a low number of pupils in Halton undertaking the English Baccalaureate but those who did take it performed very well.
- EHCP pupils in Key Stage 4 had achieved close to the national average in their results.
- Three new Early Intervention Officers had been recruited, and they will do collaborative working between headteacher groups.

The following additional information was provided in response to Member's questions:

- The national average attainment performance for children who received free school meals was 51.2% whereas it was 51.7% in Halton.
- Officers planned to hold annual 'keep in touch' meetings with schools to continue exam result improvements.
- Officers will review obtaining more finances for schools who had more 'vulnerable' children.
- External support advisors were effective for schools to help them support vulnerable children.
- Early Intervention Officers visit children in nursery settings. There was no statutory duty for children to attend nurseries, but officers looked at links between educational attainment, safeguarding and non-attendance.
- Officers will bring a presentation on the Cradle to Career Project to January's meeting.
- It was unknown why the English Baccalaureate numbers were low, but it was predicted that it was because pupils did not often like taking a qualification not in English.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Head of Children's Services

REPORT TO: Children, Young People & Families PPB

DATE: 19 January 2026

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: 19 January 2026

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 13 NOVEMBER 2025**

EXB64	HOME TO SCHOOL AND POST 16 TRAVEL AND TRANSPORT POLICY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) POLICY 2026-2027 RECOMMENDATIONS - KEY DECISION
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The Board considered a report of the Executive Director - Children's Services, that provided an update on the consultation process that had taken place from 2 April to 6 May 2025, on the Home to School and Post 16 Travel and Transport Policy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities 2026-27. A copy of the Policy was attached to the report and would be implemented from 1 September 2026 for all new applicants for travel support.

Reason(s) for Decision

To agree changes to the Home to School and Post 16 Travel and Transport Policy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Policy 2026-27

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Given the current financial position of the Council and the significant pressure on this current Home to School Transport budget, to do nothing would impact the local authority's ability to set a balanced and sustainable budget.

Implementation Date

All aspects of this policy would be implemented from 1 September 2026 for all new applicants for travel support.

RESOLVED: That the 2026-27 Home to School & Post 16 Travel and Transport Policy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) be approved.

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 11 DECEMBER 2025

EXB75	CHILDRENS SERVICES COMMISSIONED CONTRACT EXTENSIONS
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The Board considered a report of the Executive Director of Children's Services, that sought approval for a series of staged extensions via requests to various contractual waivers, in compliance with Procurement Standing Orders

1.14.4.3 and 1.14.4 iv seeking to waive parts 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders. The waivers were for several contracts identified in the report and overarching rationale was provided for each, alongside individual contractual considerations. The eighteen short term extensions would allow:

- a focused workplan to be spread more equitably across the financial year, resulting in contract end dates of April and October respectively and allow a dedicated focus on each contract;
- the allocated commissioning officers time and space to fully review each contract, allowing for more options to be considered, including the use of open and competitive tenders, or longer-term direct awards, based on quality audits of the outcomes achieved across the specification key performance indicators; and
- the Procurement Team time to plan the preferred options into their annual work schedules.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the report be noted;
- 2) approval be given to the Emotional Health and Wellbeing contract with Barnardo's being extended for 12 months, in pursuance of Procurement Standing Order 1.14.3 (non-emergency procedures – not exceeding a value threshold of £100,000), seeking to waive parts 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders;
- 3) approval be given to the Advocacy and Independent Visitor (CRAIV) contract with NYAS being extended for 6 months, in pursuance of Procurement Standing Order 1.14.3 (non-emergency procedures – not exceeding a value threshold of £100,000), seeking to waive parts 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders;
- 4) approval be given to the Personal Assistant Services contract with Positive Futures Consultancy being extended for 12 months, in pursuance of Procurement Standing Order 1.14.3 (non-emergency procedures – not exceeding a value threshold of £100,000), seeking to waive part 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders;
- 5) approval be given to the Specialist Children's Domestic Abuse Service contract with The Children's Society being extended for 6 months, in pursuance of Procurement Standing Order 1.14.3 (non-emergency procedures – not exceeding a value threshold of £100,000), seeking to waive part 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders;
- 6) approval be given to the Friendships Groups contract with VIBE being extended for 6 months, in pursuance of Procurement Standing Order 1.14.3

(non-emergency procedures – not exceeding a value threshold of £100,000), seeking to waive part 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders;

7) approval be given to the Specialist Seating contract with Newlyn Healthcare being extended for 12 months, in pursuance of Procurement Standing Order 1.14.3 (non-emergency procedures – not exceeding a value threshold of £100,000), seeking to waive part 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders;

8) approval be given to the Supported Accommodation contract with P3 being extended for 12 months, in pursuance of Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 (non-emergency procedures – exceeding a value threshold of £100,000), seeking to waive part 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders;

9) approval be given to the PAUSE and REACH Programmes contract with PAUSE Halton being extended for 12 months, in pursuance of Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 (non-emergency procedures – exceeding a value threshold of £100,000), seeking to waive part 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders; and

10) the re-commissioning of each service, via open competitive tender, or otherwise, at the extended contract end dates, be undertaken by the Children's Head of Commissioning and Quality Assurance in liaison with the Portfolio Holder for Children's.

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

DATE: 19th January 2026

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director of Children's Services

SUBJECT: Cradle to Career – Halton Lea

PORTFOLIO: Children, Young People & Families

WARDS(S): Halton Lea

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide a progress report following the first 3 years of the Cradle to Career project in Halton Lea and outline the proposals for Years 4 – 6.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 2.1 The report and presentation be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The *Cradle to Career* programme, delivered by Right to Succeed, is a place-based initiative designed to transform outcomes for children and young people by addressing systemic barriers to education, health, and wellbeing. Halton Lea was selected as a pilot area due to high levels of deprivation, persistent attainment gaps, and the need for coordinated multi-agency support.
- 3.2 The vision is to ensure that every child in Halton Lea has the opportunity to thrive from birth through to adulthood. This is achieved through a collective impact approach, bringing together schools, local authority services, health partners, voluntary organisations, and families to create a shared plan for improvement
- 3.3 The key objectives for the programme are:
 - Early Years Readiness: Improve school readiness through targeted family support and high-quality early years provision.
 - Educational Attainment: Raise literacy and numeracy standards across primary and secondary phases.
 - Wellbeing and Inclusion: Address social, emotional, and mental health needs through integrated support services.
 - Community Engagement: Empower families and residents to shape solutions and participate in decision-making.
 - Post-16 Pathways: Strengthen progression routes into further education, training, and employment

3.4 Implementation Approach

1. Data-Driven Decision Making: Use local data to identify priority needs and track progress.
2. Collaborative Governance: Establish a local partnership board with representation from education, health, and community sectors
3. Integrated Support: Align services to reduce duplication and ensure timely interventions.
4. Capacity Building: Provide professional development for educators and practitioners to embed inclusive practices.
5. Continuous Evaluation: Monitor impact through agreed metrics and adapt strategies based on evidence.

3.5 Progress to Date

- Increased engagement of local schools and early years settings in shared improvement plans.
- Development of literacy hubs and targeted interventions for disadvantaged learners, resulting in improved educational outcomes.
- Strengthened family support networks through community-based programmes.
- Positive feedback from stakeholders on improved collaboration and trust.

3.6 A presentation will be provided by Cradle to Career and Halton Officers during the meeting outlining further the impact to date and the plans for the remaining 3 years of the programme.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 This project is separately managed and overseen by the Cradle to Career Steering Group, supporting by Right to Succeed.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The funding for the programme is overseen by Right to Succeed.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

Improving outcomes for children and young people across Halton Lea.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

This is one of the key objectives of the programme, with outcomes focussed on reducing NEET

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

The programme is focussed heavily upon community-led support to improve outcomes for children and young people.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most in Need

Halton Lea was identified through discovery at the start of the project as the area of Halton with the highest levels of deprivation and where the biggest difference could be made.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

There are no specific implications for the environment arising from this report.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

As a community led project, the voices of the families within Halton-Lea are fundamental to the success of the project.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 There are no new risk implications identified emerging from the recommendations in this report.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 There are no equality and diversity issues identified emerging from the recommendations in this report.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no specific implications for the environment arising from this report.

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

10.1 None

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

DATE: 19th January 2026

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director of Children's Services

PORTFOLIO: Children, Young People & Families

SUBJECT: Number of young people who are Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) and Youth Guarantee Trailblazer

WARDS: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To report the Annual NEET and Not Known figures for Halton and provide an update on the Youth Guarantee Trailblazer outcomes.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That

- 1) the report be noted;**
- 2) information about the current situation in January 2026 be tabled at the meeting.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The Education and Skills Act 2008 placed two Raising Participation Age related duties on local authorities regarding academic age 16- & 17-year-olds:

- Local authorities must promote the effective participation in education and training of 16- & 17-year-olds in their area with a view to ensuring that those persons fulfil the duty to participate in education or training.
- Local authorities must make arrangements – that is, maintain a tracking system – to identify 16- & 17-year-olds who are not participating in education or training.

3.2 The 16+ Education to Employment (E2E) Team in Halton work to fulfil these two duties by tracking the participation of all academic age 16- & 17-year-olds who are resident in Halton. In addition, young people between 18 – 25 years old with a maintained Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) are tracked. The 16+E2E Team provide Careers Guidance and support to those who are not participating, and work with schools to support young people to transition from Year 11 into Post 16 education.

- 3.3 As part of the statutory duties the Department for Education (DfE) require every local authority to report monthly on the participation of academic age 16- & 17-year-olds, and those up to 25 with a maintained EHCP.
- 3.4 The DfE collate the data provided by local authorities and publish an annual measure of the percentage of young people who are NEET or whose activity is Not Known to the local authority. This percentage is an average of the figures across December, January and February annually. The figure is for academic age 16- & 17-year-olds who live in Halton. It does not include children in the care of Halton who live out of borough or those with a maintained EHCP older than academic age 17. It does include children in the care of other local authorities but live in Halton.
- 3.5 After years of NEET and Not Know figures decreasing in Halton, and being significantly lower than other areas, the number of young people who are NEET has risen. The increase is significantly greater in Halton than in other local authorities.

Figure 1: Annual 3-month average combined NEET and Not Known results:

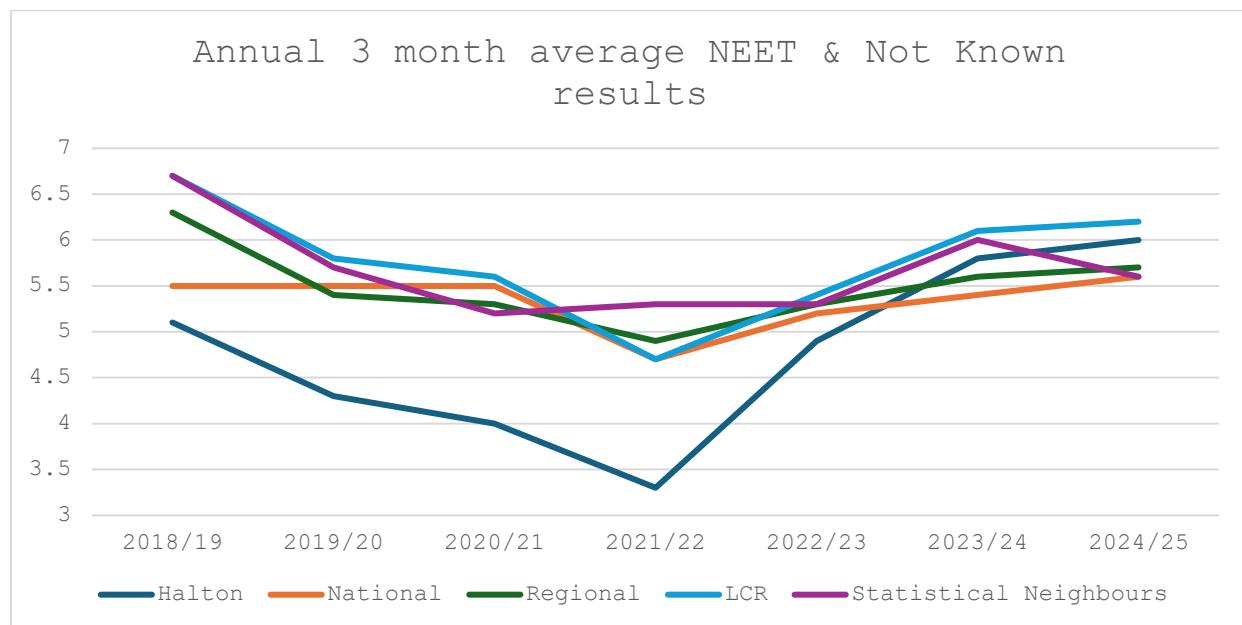


Table 1: Annual 3-month average combined NEET and Not Known percentages

	Halton	National	Regional	LCR	Statistical Neighbours
2018/19	5.1%	5.5%	6.3%	6.7%	6.7%
2019/20	4.3%	5.5%	5.4%	5.8%	5.7%
2020/21	4%	5.5%	5.3%	5.6%	5.2%
2021/22 (SN changes applied)	3.3% (= 106 young people)	4.7%	4.9%	4.7%	5.3%
2022/23	4.9%	5.2%	5.3%	5.4%	5.3%
2023/24	5.8%	5.4%	5.6%	6.1%	6%
2024/25	6% (=210 young people)	5.6%	5.7%	6.2%	5.6%

3.6 Not Known Figures - For those whose activity is Not Known to the local authority Halton has consistently performed well in this measure as we have a strong tracking process and good relationships with others to share information. In 2024/25 the Not Known figure for Halton is 0.3% (10 young people) compared to 2.2% Nationally and 1.4% Regionally.

3.7 Halton's figure of 0.3% Not Known for 2024/25 is the same as it was in 2021/22. Therefore, the increase in the overall 3-month average combined NEET and Not Known percentage all comes from an increase in the number of young people who are NEET.

3.8 Three key reasons NEET figures have been rising are:

3.8.1 Less young people returning to their studies after the end of one academic year and the start of the next academic year. Table 2 illustrates the reduction in the number of young people who secured an offer of learning or training in September 2025 compared to September 2022.

Table 2: September Guarantee percentages comparison

September Guarantee	Year 11	Year 12
2025	97.4%	90.7%
2022	97.7%	94.3%

3.8.2 More young people leaving education, employment or training part way through an academic year. Table 3 illustrates the growth in the number of young people who become NEET during an academic year.

Table 3: NEET Joiners and Leavers comparison

	Joining NEET cohort	Leaving NEET cohort	Difference
2019/20	233	166	67
2024/25	382	227	155

3.8.3 Lack of Post 16 provision in Halton, especially provision that allows learners to join part way through an academic year is also resulting in an increase in NEET figures as there are limited opportunities for young people to access education or training.

3.9 Post 16 funding is paid directly to providers from the Department for Education (DfE) and works on a lagged learner model, with a cut off point in November annually. For example, a provider who allows a learner to join a course in January 2025 may not receive funding for that learner until September 2026.

3.10 Providers reference this DfE funding methodology as the main reason why they are unable to offer provision opportunities part way through an academic year.

3.11 Whilst two new Post 16 providers started deliver in Halton in 2024/25 one provider has since left the borough due to the DfE funding methodology reducing their allocation for 2025/26.

3.12 A Post 16 Gap Application was submitted to DfE to bring a new provider into the borough for 2026.

3.13 In December 2025 the DfE confirmed there is a gap in provision in Halton. DfE stated that due to affordability challenges they were unable to provide additional funding to meet the provision gap.

3.14 Work is taking place with the current provider base in Halton to review the transition and retention of young people in education and training.

3.15 For young people who are 18 years or older and looking for employment support is being accessed from the Youth Guarantee Trailblazer.

3.16 The Youth Guarantee Trailblazer (YGT) is aimed at supporting care leavers and young people aged 18-21 who are NEET. There are 8 UK Youth Guarantee Trailblazers being piloted nationally. The YGT areas are: Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, East Midlands, Liverpool City Region, Tees Valley, West Midlands, West of England, and two in London.

- 3.17 YGT was launched in Halton on the 9th of September 2025. It is delivered by HBC's Employment, Learning and Skills Division (jointly delivered by Halton People into Jobs and Halton Adult Learning) and in close collaboration with the 16+ Education to Employment Team and the Young People's Pathway Teams. This collaboration working effectively will be key to maximising the support available for young people.
- 3.18 Year 1 of the programme is contracted to run from September 2025 – March 2026. Funding for subsequent years may be available.
- 3.19 Table 4 shows the four separate funding streams within the YGT:

Table 4 Youth Guarantee Trailblazer funding streams

1.1	Support for care leavers and care experienced young people aged 18-21.
1.2	Tracking young people aged 18 and 19 not in Employment, Education and/or Training (NEET)
1.3	Employment and Employability Support for young people aged 18-21 (NEET)
1.4	Employer engagement and incentives for recruiting young people aged 18-21 (NEET or care leavers)

- 3.20 The aim of the YGT is to try new and innovative approaches to engage with NEET young people and/or care leavers. Funding can be used more flexibly to help remove barriers that are impacting on young people accessing training, employment or self-employment.
- 3.21 All referrals to the YGT are triaged through Halton People into Jobs. Employment Specialists provide a tailored programme of practical support and signpost to appropriate services where specialist advice is needed e.g. housing, debt, mental health etc. This wrap around support is provided throughout their time on the programme and continues when they move into work to ensure they have the best chances of sustaining employment.
- 3.22 Halton Adult Learning, funded by devolved Adult Skills Budget, offers a range of programmes to support Halton residents aged 19+ (due to specific funding criteria). YGT can provide opportunities for young people to upskill and to engage in activities and interventions for young people that are aged eighteen who would not ordinarily be able to access these services through Adult Learning.
- 3.23 Effective employer engagement is a key element of the YGT. Sourcing employers who can provide paid opportunities that young people want is vital. Financial incentives of £3,000 can be offered to employers who are recruiting a young person that is eligible and has signed up to the YGT.
- 3.24 Up to October 2025 nine young people have been supported into paid employment and three employers have received a financial incentive for

employing a young person. Updated figures will be provided up to December 2025 at the meeting.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no policy implications of pursuing the recommended course of action.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Youth Guarantee Trailblazer is externally funded by DWP via the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. A Grant Funding Agreement is in place between the LCRCA and Halton Borough Council.

5.2 Income and expenditure are closely monitored through a combination of internal and external mechanisms, to ensure that contracts are delivered efficiently.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

Supporting young people to make a positive and sustained transition into Post 16 education or training allows them to continue their journey to gain the skills and abilities needed for long term employment. Employment is a route to independence and choices as an adult.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

Supporting young people to make a positive and sustained transition into Post 16 education or training allows them to continue their journey to gain the skills and abilities needed for long term employment. This creates the next generation of local workforce to meet the skills needs of our local economy.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

Supporting young people to make a positive and sustained transition into Post 16 education or training, and continue into employment is integral to ensuring they reach their full potential.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most in Need

Social and economic factors show Halton young people to be at higher risk of NEET. These risk factors can be mitigated against with the right level of support to transition into and sustain Post 16 education or training, and through the Youth Guarantee Trailblazer offer.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

None.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

The Youth Guarantee Trailblazer supports young people aged 18-21 (some with SEND) to access opportunities and support in the community. Placements can be offered in community venues such as Halton Adult Learning to add value to the community.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 Opportunities associated with the proposed actions are:

7.1.1 Raise awareness of the provision landscape in Halton and the opportunities for young people through the Youth Guarantee Trailblazer.

7.2 The risks associated with not taking the proposed actions are:

7.2.1 Lack of understanding of the experience of Post 16 providers, and young people in the borough.

7.2.2 Lack of referrals to the Youth Guarantee Trailblazer meaning the resource available not being used fully, and potential that future funding would be reduced as a result.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 Supporting young people who are NEET gives those most at risk of not being financially independent the opportunity to re-engage in education or training and progress towards sustained, long term employment.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There is no effect on the environment.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Participation of young people in education, employment or training – statutory guidance for local authorities April 2024	Participation of young people: education, employment and training - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)	Hâf Bell

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

DATE: 19th January 2026

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director of Children's Services

SUBJECT: Halton Local Area SEND Sufficiency Strategy

PORTFOLIO: Children, Young People & Families

WARDS(S): Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To present the Halton's SEND Sufficiency Strategy and deliver a presentation on the progress to date on delivering upon the priorities identified

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 2.1 The strategy be endorsed and actions to take to date be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Halton's new SEND sufficiency strategy builds on the SEND Partnership improvement plan and focuses specifically on ensuring that Halton has the right provision, in the right place, at the right time to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND locally.
- 3.2 The SEND Sufficiency Strategy aims to:
 - Assess current and projected demand for SEND provision across early years, schools, and post-16 settings.
 - Identify gaps in specialist provision and mainstream inclusion support.
 - Develop a sustainable model that prioritizes local placements, reducing reliance on out-of-borough and independent placements.
 - Improve outcomes by ensuring timely access to high-quality education, health, and care services.
- 3.3 The key drivers behind the strategy are:
 - Inspection Outcomes: The Ofsted/CQC report highlighted systemic weaknesses in planning and provision, making sufficiency a critical priority.
 - Financial Pressures: Rising costs of out-of-area placements and transport require a strategic approach to resource allocation.
 - Local Ambition: Keeping children within Halton supports stronger communities, better educational outcomes, and long-term economic benefits.

3.4 Following the development of the strategy, progress has been made through the submission of expressions of interest by schools in order to enable further in-borough SEND provision to be created. A presentation will be given at the meeting to provide an update on progress made and the next steps to enable additional provision to be in place for the 26/27 academic year.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Areas for improvement will inform policy and service development within Education, Inclusion & Provision.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Local Authority receives a SEND Capacity Capital Needs Grant from the DfE. This will be used to fund any works required to adapt buildings to enable provision to be developed. Placements within any new SEND provision will be funded through the Schools High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

Enabling more children to be educated in their community, in provision suitable for their needs.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

Keeping our children local to Halton and improving their educational outcomes will build stronger communities, create better employment opportunities that will support talent within Halton to remain in Halton.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

The Ofsted CQC inspection findings 'widespread and/or systemic failings' has a direct and indirect effect on the lives of both current and future children and families in Halton.

As set out in our Children & Young People's Partnership Plan our ambition is for Halton's children, young people and families to be truly outstanding. The SEND Sufficiency strategy supports this ambition with commitment of partners to ensure it contributes to positive opportunities and effective help being available at the right time – enabling children and their families to make the choices that mean they can thrive and achieve.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most in Need

The SEND Sufficiency Strategy outlines the areas where provision is needed across the borough and the rationalisation in prioritising funding where it is needed most.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

There are no specific implications for the environment arising from this report.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

As set out in our Children & Young People's Partnership Plan our ambition is for Halton's children, young people and families to be truly outstanding. The SEND sufficiency strategy supports this ambition with commitment of partners to ensure it contributes to positive opportunities and effective help being available at the right time – enabling children and their families to make the choices that mean they can thrive and achieve.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 There are no new risk implications identified emerging from the recommendations in this report.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 There are no equality and diversity issues identified emerging from the recommendations in this report.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no specific implications for the environment arising from this report.

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

10.1 None.



SAFE
HAPPY
HEALTHY
SUCCEEDING

Halton SEND Sufficiency Strategy Phase Two: 2025-2030



NHS
Cheshire and Merseyside



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1. Foreword

Welcome to Phase Two of our SEND Sufficiency Strategy. We started Phase One of our sufficiency planning work in 2022 with Phase Two being implemented from 2025. With something as complex and evolving as SEND sufficiency planning, the phased approach enabled a manageable implementation allowing focus on priority actions at that time and allowed us to adjust and scale up in a more informed way. It also took into consideration that SEND needs and population trends can shift and this gives us time to monitor impact, reassess data and allowed flexibility to adapt to new challenges or opportunities. This phased approach also assisted resource management i.e. financial and staffing resources, secure additional funding (e.g. from DfE or local budgets) between phases and to build capacity gradually across schools and services. Learning from Phase One has informed Phase Two.

This Phase Two Sufficiency Strategy continues our work to ensure inclusion and high standards of achievement for Halton's children and young people with SEND, it will continue to improve, shape, further develop and forecast our future SEND needs/provision across the Borough to ensure that all children and young people in Halton can access the right educational provision at the right time and in the right place, across all stages of their education.

This Strategy and its accompanying action plan were developed through co-production, with active engagement from key stakeholders. It has been informed by robust analysis of SEND datasets allowing robust forecasting of future educational needs and to ensure that future Education, Health and Care Plans offer good value for money across the borough, it should be read alongside the following key documents:

Data and intelligence has been drawn together from across the system to provide the most accurate possible picture of the current supply and demand of specialist education placements.

- Halton Children and Young People's Partnership Plan
- Halton SEND Strategy
- Halton Education Strategy (under development)
- Halton Alternative Provision Strategy
- Joint Commissioning Strategy
- Childcare Sufficiency Assessment



2. Phase One Achievements

In delivering Phase One of our SEND Sufficiency Strategy, Halton have successfully achieved the following:

- Secured £1m grant funding via the Department of Education under the 'Delivering Better Value' (DBV) programme to build resilience across all educational settings to support and include learners with Social, Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) Needs.
- Added 36 new specialist secondary SEMH places at The Raise Academy for academic year 2024/5, with a further 12 places scheduled for 2025/26, which will provide 48 places.

Following the initial announcement of the High Needs Provision Capital Funding allocation, SEND colleagues engaged with primary, secondary, and special schools across Halton to identify priorities for expanding SEND provision, guided by the SEND Sufficiency Strategy at the time. This consultation led to a series of capital projects across mainstream and special schools, summarised as follows:



Special School Enhancements

- **Cavendish:** Two new classrooms for pupils with SLD, PMLD, and ASC (with SLC).
- **Brookfields at Hallwood Park:** 40-place satellite provision via 4 new classrooms for pupils with severe and complex learning difficulties and ASD.
- **Ashley:** Plans approved for a four classroom extension for circa 40 pupils with ASC, due to be open September 2026".
- **All Special Schools:** Capacity assessments completed to explore future expansion.



Mainstream Primary School Resource Provisions

- **Astmoor:** 8-place KS1 and 8-place KS2 SEMH provisions.
- **Kingsway:** 10-place KS1 and 9-place KS2 ASC provisions.
- **Oakfield:** 10-place KS1 and 10-place KS2 SLCN provisions.
- **St Basil's:** Early Years/KS1 Assessment and Reception/KS1 SEN Resource Provisions.
- **The Brow:** Suitability improvements to existing provision.
- **Victoria Road:** 8-place KS1 and 8-place KS2 SEMH provisions.
- **Westfield:** 8-place KS1 and 8-place KS2 SLCN provisions.
- **Woodside:** 8 place KS1 SEMH provision (KS2 already in place).



Mainstream Secondary School Resource Provisions

- **Saints Peter & Paul:** 8-place KS3 and 8-place KS4 ASC units.

The above capital works were funded from circa £5.9M High Needs Provision Capital Allocation awarded to Halton by the Department for Education.

Having successfully achieved all of the above, we are now ready to progress to Phase Two - SEND Sufficiency Strategy

3. Legislative Context

It is important to remind ourselves of the legislative guidance and regulations that that we are required to comply with. Halton Borough Council has a statutory duty under Section 14 of the Education Act (1996) to ensure there are enough school places for all children in the borough. This responsibility spans from early years and childcare through to mainstream education up to age 19 and includes provision for children and young people with SEND up to age 25.

The Government's vision for children and young people with SEND is the same as for all children and young people - that they achieve well and lead happy and fulfilled lives. The [Children and Families Act 2014](#) places important statutory responsibilities on local authorities for supporting children and young people. This is a vital role that LAs retain in our increasingly school-led education system and one that requires long-term strategic planning, informed by detailed local knowledge enhanced through consultation with parents and carers, and good relationships with local schools. LAs must ensure there are sufficient good school places for all pupils, including those with SEND.

The [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years](#) (2015) also place further responsibilities on local authorities, by emphasising that every child deserves an education that meets their specific needs, encourages high standards, and supports them in reaching their full potential.

Significant reforms to childcare removes barriers to work for nearly half a million parents with a child under 3 in England not working due to caring responsibilities, reducing discrimination against women, and benefitting the wider economy in the process. The funded hours sit alongside the existing funded hours: 15 hours for the most disadvantaged 2 year olds, universal 15 hours for all 3 and 4 year olds and the extended 30 hours for eligible 3 and 4 year olds. The funded hours will be introduced in phases and is dependent on the parent/carer meeting eligibility criteria. [National Wraparound Childcare Programme Handbook](#)

Across England and Wales there is a growing SEND Sufficiency Challenge. Over the past decade, the number of EHCPs have more than doubled and the supply of specialist placements is vastly outstripped by the number of families whose child is assessed as needing one. This is in turn placing vast financial pressures on Local Authorities who are required to pay much higher fees to fulfil their statutory duties often at the direction of tribunals. As it stands, SEND represents a genuine existential threat to the financial sustainability of local government.

Meanwhile, many local schools willing to work with SEND children are not able to access additional resources they require to meet their needs appropriately. Regrettably, the SEND system reforms introduced over a decade ago have not resulted in improved outcomes or employment opportunities for many SEND children.

The County Councils Network (CCN) and Local Government Association (LGA) commissioned the Isos Partnership to produce an independent report, [Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England](#). The report takes a holistic overview of the widespread and systemic challenges within the SEND system, many of which are linked to sufficiency. This Strategy has also been informed by those key findings/recommendations.

4. Halton: Where we are now

Population/Cohorts

66

State-funded schools in Halton **including**

*one all-through school



1 Pupil Referral Unit

18,463 pupils

Being educated in Halton's state-funded schools, of which **491 are in Special Schools**

January Pupil Census 2024-25



Halton has a population of **38,461**

children and young people aged 0-25 years

Office of National Statistics 2024



In Halton's state-funded schools **1,107** children and young people have an EHCP

and **2,938** children and young people with SEN Support are educated

Special Educational Needs in England 2024



1712

children and young people with an EHCP across the 0-25 age range



SEN2 2025

In Halton **89.4%** of 16-17 olds participate in education and training



5.4% of 16-17 year olds undertake an apprenticeship

NCCIS Local Authority monthly returns February 2025



A greater proportion of young people in Halton **(10.6%)** aged 16-17 years old

are not participating in either education or training, which is higher than both the national and regional average

NCCIS Local Authority monthly returns February 2025



An increasing proportion of children and young people with EHCPs are educated in mainstream schools, up to

41.9% in 2023-24

Education, Health and Care Plan in England 2024



99% of Halton children are offered their first choice Secondary school place

School place preference data return 2025

In the past year, an additional **166** special places have been delivered within Special schools and Resource Provision in Halton



Halton was awarded **£1m** grant funding from the Department for Education (DfE) to implement the agreed 'Delivering Better Value' (DBV) SEND improvement plans to build resilience across all educational settings

DfE, DBV Programme

Education Provision



*Includes one all-through school

Halton's current number of commissioned places in resource provision and maintained special schools is 757. This is made of 30 resource provision and units (across 13 primary and 2 secondary schools); and 5 special schools. However, the current specialist places needed is 893, leaving Halton with a difference of 136 places. Currently, the difference is being covered through Non-Maintained Independent Special Schools (NMISS) Out of Borough placements.

Data

Data and intelligence has been drawn together from across the system to provide the most accurate possible picture of the current supply and demand of specialist education placements.

Number of statements of SEN/EHC plans, 2017 to 2024										
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	
Halton (H)	599	688	771	904	1,034	1,189	1,319	1,524	1712*	
England (E)	287,290	319,819	353,995	390,109	430,697	473,255	517,026	575,963	**	
NWR	38,465	42,711	47,353	52,875	58,455	64,506	71,970	82,819	**	
SN10	11,487	12,661	14,146	15,322	16,212	17,227	18,938	20,947	**	
LCR	7,215	8,001	9,108	10,852	12,348	13,735	16,274	18,757	**	

The data tells us that in recent years there has been rapid growth in the demand for specialist education placements. Increasingly, more placements are being made in education settings outside of the Borough which include a combination of specialist resource provisions, special schools and on independent, non-maintained special schools (NMIS), these settings are usually far from a child's home and extremely costly.

Nationally, Halton ranks 36th in terms of EHCP issuance rates among all local authorities in England. The demand for places is particularly strong for children with autism, speech language and communication needs or SEMH. This plan explores how Halton could meet this increasing demand.

Breakdown by primary needs and key stages for each year starting from 2024/25

Specialist Provision (Resource Provision, specialist setting and EOTAS)													
Key Stage	ASD	HI	MLD	MSI	OTH	PD	PMLD	SEMH	SLCN	SLD	SPLD	VI	Total
Reception	19	0	8	0	0	0	1	2	13	0	0	0	43
KS1	57	0	1	1	0	1	0	4	60	1	0	1	126
KS2	86	5	9	1	1	11	0	44	61	8	1	2	229
KS3	74	2	13	0	0	4	1	52	69	1	1	2	219
KS4	60	3	19	0	0	6	1	63	32	3	1	1	189
KS5	42	2	4	0	0	3	1	12	9	1	0	1	75
Post-NC	7	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	12
Total	345	12	54	2	1	26	4	178	245	15	3	8	893
Mainstream (Excluding Resource Provision)													
Key Stage	ASD	HI	MLD	MSI	OTH	PD	PMLD	SEMH	SLCN	SLD	SPLD	VI	Total
Early year (Reception Inclusive)	18	0	23	1	0	1	0	3	35	0	0	0	81
KS1	22	1	5	0	3	2	0	8	35	0	0	0	76
KS2	34	3	26	1	0	9	0	57	43	3	2	0	178
KS3	32	2	13	2	2	4	0	44	31	0	5	2	137
KS4	16	3	12	0	1	0	0	26	14	0	3	0	75
KS5	37	3	8	0	1	11	0	37	20	2	2	1	122
Post-NC	23	1	7	0	0	2	0	4	6	0	0	0	43
Total	182	13	94	4	7	29	0	179	184	5	12	3	712
PRU(The Bridge)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	12
Others (Except EOTAS)	6	3	4	0	0	0	0	20	6	0	1	0	40
NEET	10	0	2	0	1	1	0	38	2	0	0	1	55
Grand total	543	28	155	6	9	56	4	426	437	20	16	12	1712

Nationally, spending on high needs has continued to rise, with High Needs Block allocations now exceeding previous expenditure levels. In Halton, 38% of this funding is directed toward special school places and top-up support for children and young people with EHCPs. This financial pressure is mirrored across local authorities, and despite a modest budget increase this year, both local and national forecasts indicate that the net deficit is expected to grow over the next three to four years.

SEND in Halton's Schools – EHCPs and SEN Support



Breakdown of education placements costs, January 2025

Types of Placement	Primary	Secondary	Post 16	Post 19
Number in mainstream	488	238		
Average yearly cost per pupil. Including Element 1, 2 & 3	£14,195	£5,578		
Number in maintained special	176	262		
Average yearly cost per pupil. Including Element 1, 2 & 3	£15,296	£20,470		
Number in maintained special (Sixth Form/Post 16)			51	
Number in independent (NMIS)	27	98	11	
Average yearly cost per pupil	£69,936	£63,319	£72,643	
Number in mainstream Further Education Institutions			122	43
Average yearly cost per student Elements 2 & 3			£11,753	£12,983
Number in Post 16-19 Independent Specialist Provision (Funded by ESFA)			6	11
Average yearly cost per student Elements 2 & 3			£41,780	£48,429

Funding

How is SEND Provision funded?

All pupils/students attract an amount of funding (typically around £5,500 per pupil/ student); schools and colleges are funded to provide additional support costing up to £6,000 from their core funding.

c.£5.5k Up to £6k

Where pupils/students require additional support costing over £6,000, mainstream schools and colleges will apply to the Local Authority for top-up funding from their high needs budget. This may run alongside an EHC assessment but does not have to.

c.£5.5k £6k Top-up

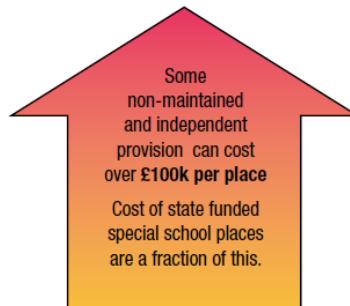
Pupils/students will only be placed in specialist provision (e.g. special schools) if they have complex needs. Special schools receive £10,000 per place funding (£4,000 + £6,000). Specialist colleges receive slightly more per place. The Local Authority determines how much top-up funding is needed.

c.£10k per place Top-up

Halton has received circa £7,189,039 High Needs Provision Capital Allocation Funding from the Department for Education. For the period April 2021 to April 2024 it received £5,991,967, which allowed for the completion/progression of the capital works described under Phase One. The anticipated balance, together with a further allocation from the DfE in April 2025 of £1,197,073 will fund the Phase Two capital works.

Expenditure has supported new and/or additional provision in both mainstream and special schools. Any capital projects agreed will be funded through High Needs Provision Capital funding. This will be subject to capital funding being agreed over the period of the Strategy. It is expected that there will be revenue savings as a result of the delivery of the SEND Sufficiency Strategy based on the difference in unit costs between in-Borough provision, within our own schools, and independent sector provision. The savings will continue to reduce, pressures on the Dedicated Schools Grant.

High Needs Funding Implications for Non-Maintained Independent Special Schools (NMISS) Expenditure



The average costs are based on analysis carried out in 2017. These figures have continued to increase in the independent sector.

Due to capacity pressures within Halton provision, the Local Authority has found itself in a position where it has had to place children in NMISS. As of January 2025, there were 136 children and young people in Halton who attended registered Non-maintained independent special schools.

The total cost for these placements as of January 2025 was circa £8.9m. This equates to an average cost of circa £65,386.82 per pupil placement. This can be compared to the average placement costs for children and young people across other educational settings detailed below.

The number of children and young people in independent placements in January 2024 is 8.0% of our overall number of EHCPS. This is a slight decrease from January 2023 at 8.2% and January 2022 at 9.0%. In January 2024, the regional average was 5.23% and nationally 5.17%.

5. Where we will be 2029/2030

Detailed forecasting enables us to track growth trends across all types of SEND, age ranges, and educational sectors. One of the most significant insights is the projected increase in the number of children and young people with EHCPs.

Projection – Number EHCP by Primary Needs and Key Stages (2029/30)

Key Stage	ASD	Specialist Provision (Resource Bases, specialist settings and EOTAS)											Notes			
		HI	MLD	MSI	OTH	PD	PMLD	SEMH	SLCN	SLD	SPLD	VI	Projected 2029-30 TOTAL	2024-25 TOTAL	Change	
Early Years	35	0	15	0	0	0	2	4	24	0	0	0	80	43	37	
KS1	92	0	2	2	0	2	0	7	97	2	0	2	206	126	80	
KS2	139	8	15	2	2	18	0	72	98	13	2	3	372	229	143	Large increase to EYS and KS1 requests from previous 5 years
KS3	111	3	20	0	0	6	2	79	104	2	2	3	332	219	113	
KS4	91	5	29	0	0	9	2	96	49	5	2	2	290	189	101	
KS5	42	2	4	0	0	3	1	12	9	1	0	1	75	75	0	Steady KS4 for 5 years but following years will increase
Post-NC	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	12	-10	Steady for 5 years but following years will increase
Specialist Total	512	18	85	4	2	38	7	270	381	23	6	11	1357	893	464	A 52% overall increase in the numbers of Plans accessing specialist provision is expected by 2029-30
Mainstream Provision (Excludes resource bases)																
Early Years	31	0	39	2	0	2	0	5	61	0	0	0	140	81	59	
KS1	36	2	8	0	5	3	0	13	57	0	0	0	124	76	48	
KS2	56	5	43	2	0	15	0	93	70	5	3	0	292	178	114	
KS3	50	3	20	3	3	6	0	69	48	0	8	3	213	137	76	
KS4	23	4	18	0	1	0	0	38	20	0	4	0	108	75	33	Steady KS4 for 5 years but following years will increase
KS5	37	3	8	0	1	11	0	37	20	2	2	1	122	122	0	Steady for 5 years but following years will increase
Post-NC	7	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	13	43	-30	Steady for 5 years but following years will increase
Mainstream Total	240	17	138	7	10	38	0	256	278	7	17	4	1012	712	300	A 42% overall increase in the number of Plans accessing mainstream provision is expected by 2029-30
Other provision (excluding EOTAS)																
PRU (The bridge)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	17	0	0	0	0	18	12	6	
Other	6	3	4	0	0	0	0	20	6	0	1	0	40	40	0	
NEET	10	0	2	0	1	1	0	38	2	0	0	1	55	55	0	
Other Total	16	3	7	0	1	1	0	75	8	0	1	1	113	107	6	It is difficult to project numbers for these children as the placement type is specific to each child's individual case
TOTAL EHC Plans	768	38	230	11	13	77	7	601	667	30	24	16	2482	1712	770	An overall increase in EHC Plans of almost 45% is expected by 2029-30, with the majority being within the early years and primary key stages. This will then follow through to future years, seeing projected increases within KS3, KS4 and KS5.

Forecasting increase by Primary Need

Main considerations

ASD will increase by 41%

MLD will increase by 48%

SEMH will increase by 40%

SLCN will increase by 53%

The number of children with EHCPs funded by the LA will rise from 1712 in 2023/24 to 2482 by 2029/30, an increase of 770.

The majority of placements for children with an EHCP in Halton are in mainstream schools and academies. Key factors have been identified as:

1. Increased younger cohort, driving growth
2. Increased primary need of SLCN, MLD and SEMH
3. Increased EHCP's being issued
4. Suitable provision or places to meet need and demand

Projections should be treated with caution. The forecasts will be kept under regular review to factor in the prevailing situations and factors at the time

6. What will we need? What we will do, and why.

This strategy aims to ensure more children and young people with SEND can be educated in appropriate provision close to home, it emphasises the need to continue to support mainstream settings to help them meet the needs of children and young people with SEND. We will procure provision that offers value for money, secure provision when and where it is needed and commission a range of provision that is robust; resilient; flexible; and creative; and which matches the range of needs of our pupils. Wherever possible we will aim is to support children within a mainstream setting.

Summary of Specialist Provision, Current and Future Places Required

Year	No. of places Required	Current Commissioned Places	Additional Specialist Places
2024/25	996	893	103
2025/26	1109	893	216
2026/27	1206	893	313
2027/28	1290	893	397
2028/29	1353	893	460
2029/30	1425	893	532

There is a need to increase actual capacity. With any available balance from the previous High Needs Provision Capital Allocation, together with the £1,197,073 allocation awarded earlier this year, there is likely to be circa £1.7m available to progress with Phase Two of the SEND Sufficiency Strategy. The Local Authority will invite expressions of interest from schools for the development of SEN units or Specially Resourced Provisions to meet currently and projected SEND need.

Additional Places Required in Mainstream Schools

Key Stage	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	Total
Early Years/Reception	13	15	11	10	10	9	68
KS1	9	10	10	9	6	4	48
KS2	21	23	24	19	14	12	113
KS3	14	16	12	10	11	9	72
KS4	8	9	7	6	6	0	36
Post 16	2	2	0	1	0	1	6
Yealy Total	67	75	64	55	47	35	343
Cumulative Total	67	142	206	261	308	343	

We will work with schools to grow so that they can accept the rise in children and young people with SLCN, MLD and SEMH. For the duration of this strategy we will consider projects such as:

- Extensions and remodelling
- Creation of satellite provision, or relocation
- De-amalgamation of sites
- Development of SEN units and Specially Resourced Provision at mainstream sites
- Age range change
- Change of designation

We are not only developing our physical provision, we are also concentrating on developing capacity and resources to improve confidence and competence across the whole system. Whilst there is undoubtably a need to increase provision/places, there are a range of other mechanisms that can be targeted. By improving support within early years and mainstream schools we can reduce the need for specialist provision. Running through all of this will be our commitment to develop the workforce to enable these changes to be successfully achieved.

Early identification, diagnosis and receiving early help in SEND provides the opportunity to address emerging difficulties before they escalate i.e. suspensions, exclusions, specialist provision, alternative provision, electively home educated any of which may ultimately lead to an EHCP which could perhaps have been avoided had the right support been available and provided at the right time. By providing a focus on this area, it can reduce the number of EHCP's issued in the long term and the number of specialist places required in the future.



As part of our graduated model for families, Halton's family hub network includes seven local family hubs (3 in Runcorn, 4 in Widnes), along with online resources and community services which support children and families across the borough. The network is a one-stop shop, offering advice and support from a range of partners to families in Halton with children aged 0-19 (25 if the child has SEND). The Hubs provide support to parents and carers so they are able to nurture their babies and children, improving health and education outcomes for all. We will continue to grow and develop the Family Hubs.



Designated Top-Up Funding is a critical part of the High Needs Block within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) in England. It provides additional, individually targeted financial support for pupils with complex SEND, especially when their needs exceed what schools can cover through their core budgets. It bridges the gap between standard provision and complex needs, supports inclusion by enabling CYP to remain in mainstream settings, and empowers schools to tailor support without needing immediate specialist placement. Typically it pays for additional support and resources that go beyond what a mainstream school is expected to provide from its core budget. We will take stock of its usage and review to ensure that it supports our sufficiency planning.



One such initiative will be the development of Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision (OAIP) guidance. The majority of children are supported via SEND support without the need for an EHCP. We will develop guidance to strengthen the support process for children and education provision in Halton. The term 'ordinarily available' is deliberately used, we want the provision to be ordinarily available in every education setting so this becomes the culture of the ordinary in Halton. It is a powerful step toward embedding inclusive practices across all education settings in Halton. By making support for children with SEND part of the everyday culture, we're aiming to create environments where every child can thrive, regardless of their needs. The development of guidance around OAIP will help standardise and strengthen SEND support across all settings.

Our Speech and Language provision is under review with a new contract and model being developed. Children with Speech, Language and Communication (SLCN) needs experience challenges in: Literacy: Social interaction: Emotional wellbeing and Academic achievement. SLCN is a known risk factor for poor life chances, especially when not identified early, it impacts on the need for other specialist support and their long term outcomes.

Our SEND School Transport Policy is under review, and being able to provide local education provision will result in a reduction in the numbers of pupils with SEND travelling long distances and impacting on travel time to reach school, it will also reduce public expenditure on transport. It will support children and young people to gain the skill needed to travel independently.

A new, updated Alternative Provision (AP) Strategy will ensure the sufficiency of specialist/AP provision to support students who are unable to attend mainstream education. This will aim to support reintegration, to help students return to inclusive mainstream education when possible and reduce reliance on high cost out of borough AP provision, reducing budget pressure on High Needs Budget.

Where some parents and carers feel that current provision does not always meet their child's needs, some families opt for elective home education as a last resort. By increasing inclusive and supportive provision it is anticipated that it will lead to a reduction in the numbers being electively home educated. Children and young people will be visible to professionals and be able to access their peer group and learn to communicate, collaborate, and build friendships.



Cllr Tom McInerney (second row right) with the Cavendish High Academy team, joined by Director of Education, Inclusion and Provision Ben Holmes (back row)



In the context of SEND sufficiency, Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) is a critical strategic priority that ensures Halton has the right services, pathways, and support in place for young people with SEND to transition successfully into adult life.

We want to raise aspirations and expectations and encourage thinking about what the future might look like for children from an early age.

We will re-establish our Preparing for Adulthood Strategic Board, with collaborative working across relevant services to provide consistent transition planning, joint commission services where appropriate and source, secure and increase the number of appropriate placements for young people 16 – 25 with SEND in Halton.

Cavendish Connect Cafe

SEND sufficiency refers to our ability to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND through appropriate provision, PfA is a core component of this, especially for those aged 14–25

7. Priorities

PRIORITY ISSUES	PRIORITY ISSUES
1 Safely reduce the number of children needing to be looked after by the Local Authority and improve safeguarding.	6 Improve attendance at school, college and in Early Years settings including sufficiency of places.
2 Improve the stability of care placements.	7 Improve professional practice including the quality of children and families social work.
3 Improve SEND provision.	8 Reduce childhood obesity.
4 Increase number of children attending schools graded good or outstanding and improve attainment outcomes at all Key Stages.	9 Improve access to positive opportunities.
5 Improve pastoral and behaviour support and reduce the need for children to be excluded.	10 Improve Mental Health provision.
	11 Strengthen the voice of children and young people.
	12 Improve pathways into meaningful employment with training and both Further and Higher Education.



[Halton Children Young People's Partnership Plan 2024-27](#), is aimed at communicating our agreed vision for all those that support children and young people in Halton. It provides an analysis of what the challenges are that our community faces, what we, as a community, feel should be the top priorities that we all need to work on together. It is therefore aimed at supporting leaders of public services, politicians, government, schools, colleges, early years settings and governors so that together we can all pull in a common direction.

The priorities we've identified through the SEND Sufficiency Strategy will complement and reinforce those within the Children and Young People Plan, ensuring coherence across our strategic frameworks



SEND Sufficiency Priorities

- 1 Expanding SEND provision in Mainstream schools (Resource Provision)
- 2 Early Years and Early Intervention
- 3 Reviewing our Designated Top Up (DTUF) Funding
- 4 Preparing for Adulthood

8. Governance

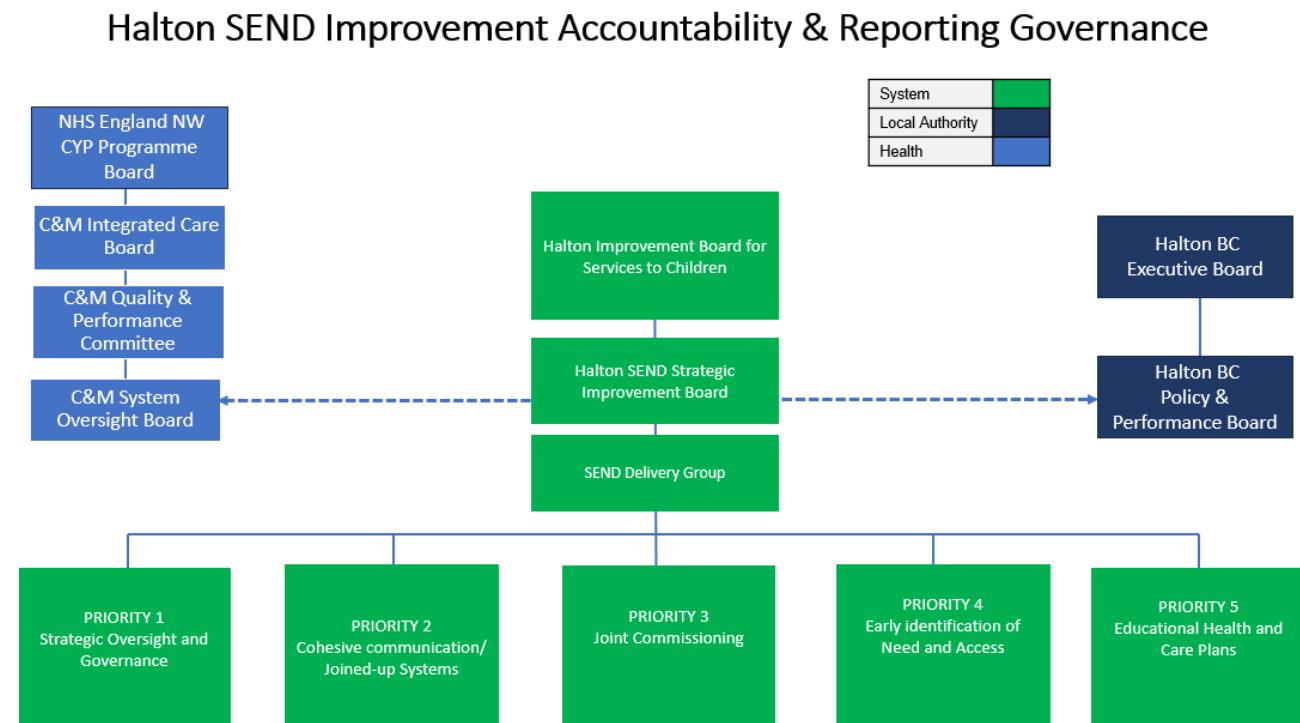
The Halton SEND Strategic Improvement Board oversees the broader SEND Strategy and Improvement Plans and will ensure that the Sufficiency Plan remains responsive to changing needs. Effective governance involves collaboration between the Council, health services, education providers, and parent/carer forums. Our governance framework is designed to provide strategic oversight, accountability, and collaborative decision-making across all relevant stakeholders. Partnership working and coproduction will remain vital for the success of this Strategy.

The Halton SEND Strategic Improvement Board will ensure that the strategy remains responsive to local needs, is informed by data and lived experience, and aligns with the broader objectives of the SEND Strategy and the Children and Young People Plan.

This strategy will be reviewed annually and again this will be overseen by Halton SEND Strategic Improvement Board, it will also work in conjunction with the Joint Commissioning Strategy and the Alternative Provision Strategy.

Progress against the strategy will be tracked through a set of agreed KPIs and performance monitoring data which will be reported via the scorecard to the Halton SEND Strategic Improvement Board. It will also be measured by reporting on financial costings.

Governing bodies, trustees of schools and academies and school forums will play a key role in ensuring SEND provision is sufficient and inclusive.



Appendix 1 Action Plan

Priority 1 – Expanding SEND Provision in Mainstream Schools SEN units and Specially Resourced Provisions

Objective	Action to reach Objective	Expected outcome – measuring success
Increase the number of SEN units and Specially Resourced Provisions across Early Years, Primary Schools, Secondary Schools and Special Schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write to schools to invite them to complete an expression of interest in opening a SEN unit or Specially Resourced Provision. Visits to schools to assess work required to adapt current buildings to host a SEN unit or Specially Resourced Provision. Review expressions of interest and identify schools that meet the criteria for having a SEN unit or Specially Resourced Provision on site Progress selected schools and their expressions of interest through EIP Heads of Service, Children's Services SLT, Chief Officers Management Team and Executive Board Inform schools that they have been successful and allow them to tender and finalise quotes Schools to progress with building work Support schools with recruitment of specialist teachers and support staff if requested Establish a working panel for placement of children with EHCP's in SEN units and Specially Resourced Provisions Quality Assure curriculum of SEN units and Specially Resourced Provisions Placement of appropriate EHCP children via 'panel' into SEN units and Specially Resourced Provisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools will submit their expressions of interest and engage in further collaboration. Schools will know what adaptations they will need to make to host a SEN unit or Specially Resourced Provision. Identify the expressions of interest that meet the criteria and inform all schools if they have been successful at this point. All relevant boards will approve the expressions of interest based on the criteria the schools have met and the available provision that can be adapted. Schools will finalise their quotes in line with the approximate funding they will receive Buildings and outdoor spaces will be adapted and meet expected standards for SEN units and Specially Resourced Provisions. Recruitment of appropriately qualified and trained staff with appropriate experience. Appoint appropriate professionals to oversee the panel and placement into SEN units and Specially Resourced provisions The curriculum will be appropriate to needs of the children and will be planned for the first half term. Panel will agree the first placement of EHCP children in the SEN units and Specially Resourced Provisions for September 2026.

Priority 2 – Early Years and Early Intervention

Objective	Action to reach Objective	Expected outcome- measuring success
Reduce the demand for special school places. It is important that children are assessed as early as possible so that robust packages for support can be put in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit 6 Education Support Practitioners to join our Virtual School and Early Help Team Recruit 3 Early Interventions Officers Continue to embed the Thrive approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They will work closely with schools, families, and partner agencies to identify and address barriers to learning and wellbeing. They will provide timely, targeted support that helps children and young people stay engaged in education and achieve positive outcomes reducing exclusions and non-attendance. Reduction in financial spend (Invest to save)
SALT – effective timely support at the right time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New contract and model established 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced suspensions, exclusions and increased attendance. Improved health outcomes Reduced level INMISS and EOTAS Higher level of attainment Reduction in financial spend, (Invest to save)
Neurodiversity Pathway		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced suspensions, exclusions and increased attendance. Improved health outcomes Reduced level INMISS and EOTAS Higher level of attainment Reduction in financial spend (Invest to save)

Priority 3 – Reviewing Designated Top Up Funding

Objective	Action to reach Objective	Expected outcome – measuring success
Develop Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision (OAIP) Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult with all stakeholders (0-25) Develop Draft Share, consult amend to finalise Launch guidance in SEND Conference in November 2025 Place on the Halton Local Offer EHCP Panel Monitor impact – EHCP requests, to evidence usage Associate existing KPI's to measure impact (attendance, suspensions, exclusions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standardises and strengthens SEND support across all settings. Provides clear expectations and practical strategies for teachers, SENCOs, and support staff. Inclusive teaching strategies and reasonable adjustments embedded in everyday practice. Supports all children and young people, including those with SEND by using resources already available to them. It supports children and young people to attend, engage, and thrive in mainstream settings without needing an EHCP Will facilitate early identification of needs of the CYP Reduced suspensions, exclusions and increased attendance. Improved health outcomes Reduced level INMISS and EOTAS Higher level of attainment Reduction in financial spend (Invest to save)

Priority 4 – Preparing for Adulthood

Objective	Action to reach Objective	Expected outcome – measuring success
Ensure EHCP in Yr 9 are reviewed and fit for purpose to support transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality Assurance and EHCP Reviewing Officer to be appointed Develop data dashboard to monitor impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More children in mainstream settings Reduced suspensions, exclusions and increased attendance. Improved health outcomes Reduced level INMISS and EOTAS Higher level of attainment Reduction in financial spend (Invest to save) Will aid schools understanding of Early Identification and OAIP guidance Reduction in EHCP plans due to it no longer being required
Riverside College to enrol more students on an EHCP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult with college Support agreed intake 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More children with an EHCP enrolled. Reduced suspensions, exclusions and increased attendance. Improved health outcomes Reduced level INMISS and EOTAS Higher level of attainment Reduction in financial spend (Invest to save)

Appendix 2 Glossary

Academy	A type of school. Publicly funded independent schools that are free from local authority control. freedoms include setting their own pay and conditions for staff, freedoms concerning the delivery of the curriculum, and the ability to change the length of their terms and school days.
AP	Alternative Provision Education arranged by a local authority or school for pupils of compulsory school age outside of mainstream or special schools. This might be for pupils with behaviour problems, health needs preventing school attendance or those without a school place. It may include full or part time placements in pupil referral units, AP academies, AP free schools or FE colleges; provision in hospital schools and independent schools; and other provision such as home tuition services and voluntary or private sector providers
ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental health Service
DCO	Designated Clinical Officer
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan details the education, health and social care needs of a child or young person who has SEN or a disability, and also the support to be provided to a child or young person. It is written by the local authority after an EHC needs assessment of the child or young person has determined that an EHC plan is necessary.
EIP	Education, Inclusion and Provision – Department of Halton Borough Council
EOTAS	Educated other than at school
Independent School	A school that is not maintained by a local authority
INMISS	Independent Non Maintained Special School
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LD	Learning Disabilities/Difficulties
Mainstream School	State school which can meet the needs of most children
MLD	Moderate Learning Difficulty
OAIP	Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision
PD	Physical Disability
PfA	Preparing for Adulthood
PMLD	Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit. Resourced or Resource Provision. - Resourced provision within mainstream schools is where pupils are either withdrawn to a resource for specialist input, or teachers from the resource deliver specialist help to the child within the classroom. A resource provision usually has a specialist focus such as hearing impairment or autism spectrum disorder.
SALT	Speech and Language Therapy
SEMH	Social, Emotional and Mental Health
SENC0	Special Educational Needs Coordinator. In some schools and academies these may be called SENDCO
SEND	Special educational needs and disabilities
SEND Code of Practice	Code of Practice 2015 the Code outlines the working arrangements for the Children and Families Act 2014 SEND measures
SEND Local Area Inspection	Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspect local areas together to see how effectively they fulfil their responsibilities for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
SENDIASS	Special Educational Needs & Disabilities Information Advice & Support Service. Provides information and support to parents/carers whose children have special educational needs.
Short Breaks	An identified package of support to give parent/carers a break from caring. Short breaks can be overnight care for the child/young person with disabilities, daytime activities or a carer. Families may also be receiving support from the Children with Disabilities Service.

SLCN	Speech, Language & Communication Needs
SLD	Severe Learning Difficulties
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
Special School	A school which is specially organised to make special educational provision for pupils with SEN.
Strategy	The plan and actions the organisation intends to take to achieve long-term goals.
Vision	An aspirational description of what an organisation would like to achieve or accomplish in the mid-term or long-term future

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

DATE: 19th January 2026

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director of Children's Services

PORTOLIO: Children, Young People and Families

SUBJECT: Children's Residential Sufficiency Update

WARD(S): All Wards

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The report is to accompany the attached slide decks which detail the progress of the Sufficiency Strategy within Childrens Services.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That

- 1) the report be noted; and
- 2) the Board are updated on the Strategy.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Halton Borough Council's Children's Services are currently working collaboratively with We Are Juno, a Community Interest Company (CIC), to increase in borough capacity of residential children's homes. This agreement is in direct relation to the Halton Borough Council Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2025-2028, which forms an integral part of the wider Children and Young Peoples Plan. The plans being developed are to deliver high-quality residential care and support services for children and young people that promote safety, well-being, development, and preparation for adulthood.

3.2 All homes will be developed collaboratively based on an ethos of coproduction, trust and collaboration at every stage of the agreement; through a partnership arrangement where Halton Borough Council and We are Juno seek to share risk and responsibility in order to deliver great outcomes for children and young people. All of the Homes included within the agreement will be co-designed by We are Juno and Halton Borough Council's Children's Services, with input from care experienced children and/or adults.

3.3 The plan outlines the agreed specification of four children's homes developed in the following locations over the next 4 years:

- Home 1 – Property provided by the Service Provider in the Runcorn Locality
- Home 2 – Property provided by the Service Provider in the Widnes Locality
- Home 3 – Property provided by the Local Authority in the Widnes Locality
- Home 4 – Property provided by the Local Authority in the Runcorn Locality

3.4 Each of the homes will be designed:

- To safeguard and promote the welfare of every child
- To provide stable, nurturing, and therapeutic residential care
- To support emotional, physical, educational, and social development
- To comply with all relevant legislation and regulatory standards

3.5 The attached slides accompany the wider strategy in relation to updates and are updated prior to.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 N/A relatable to this update.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 N/A relatable to this update.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

None.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

None.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

Supporting Children, Young People and Families - Keeping looked after children in Halton will mean keeping them closer to family ties, friends and within local communities. It will support greater outcomes for children, young people and families.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need - Children in care and care leavers are among the most vulnerable in society with a plethora of research that highlight negative outcomes for those who have been care experienced. Developing local high quality, high support residential homes in Halton Borough Council will support local children in care to receive the right support to flourish and achieve their aspirations and ambitions.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

Working Towards a Greener Future - Developing provision in Halton will reduce the travel and emissions of social workers who will not have to travel significant distances to see children.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community - Developing the currently-owned asset will support our ambition to develop local homes for residents that provide a safe, supportive and enabling environment.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 Included in the update slides.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

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

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

8.3 The proposal will primarily impact children in care. This proposal will improve the sufficiency and deliver placements that are within the Halton area. It is anticipated that the provision of local high-quality, placement provision for children in care will have a positive impact.

8.4 There is also a potential positive impact for young people once they reach 18. Having been placed in county allows for smoother transitions to adulthood and leaving care support services as well as housing support in the communities and neighbourhoods that young people are familiar with and have established links in.

8.5 Children in care will be engaged in the design phase for the project. This will include personalisation of spaces and feeding into delivery of care to ensure that the service is child led.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 N/A relatable for this update.

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 Childrens Services Residential & Supported Accommodation Sufficiency Update

Provider Relationships

Progress Report	Action Log	Risks and Mitigations
Stability Meeting guidance and requirements has been distributed to all providers and now forms part of the Individual Purchasing Agreement for any new placements.	None requested to date, and no emergency immediate notice periods have been received across Residential or Supported Accommodation placements since implementation.	None, continue as BAU
Link worker roles have been established within the Placements Team and Providers now have dedicated contacts to discuss concerns.	Continue to develop relationships and initiate further conversations around reduced fee's and other beneficial arrangements soon.	None, continue as BAU
Quality Assurance Visits are underway within a risk-focused framework and the team have a target of x6 per month to be completed across Residential and Supported Accommodation Placements.	Continue to complete visits and support providers with their concerns. Thematic areas of concerns to be collated and analysed	None, continue as BAU
First Provider Forum has been completed on 25.09.25 with 28 Halton providers of Residential and Supported Accommodation in attendance	Analyse the Menti engagement and feedback next steps to providers around improvements to working relationships and ways forward	Next Forum has been identified and will focus on Community Safety and Contextual Safeguarding

Service Level Agreement

Progress Report	Action Log	Risks and Mitigations
Final draft version of SLA agreed between both parties. Reviewed by Katherine Appleton and amendments made. The SLA is now signed, and communications are being drafted to partners and the wider public.	N/A complete	There is very little chance of double funding placements if the notice periods are proactive and planned between placements and operational teams. We have discussed the initial phasing of children into each home, in consideration of the Childrens Homes Regulations and the phased admission of young people, and both parties understand this will not be utilised to maximise void payments.

Park House – 16 Appleton Village

Progress Report	Action Log	Risks and Mitigations
Onward agreed to lease handover and Onward have agreed to reimburse for redecorations costs (as outlined in contract) quotes requested for both by HBC, awaiting contractor quotes	Onward to submit meter readings to utility companies	Funding for works to property needs to be agreed and approved through the CSAM
Site visit took place on 22/09/25 to formally agree handover	Onward to forward all compliance certificates to property services (to avoid unnecessary surveys)	This delay is impacting on the Supported Accommodation Contract in place with P3 and this has now been approved for an extension.
Money for feasibility work agreed by SLT	Consultation to take place with existing residents and Participation to determine décor and configuration, etc. Childrens Services to work with property services re: feasibility and works to be completed Transition the service as soon as possible.	

14 Summer Lane – Childrens Home (January 2026)

Progress Report	Action Log	Risks and Mitigations
Work slightly delayed but started at end of September 2025 with estimated 20–24-week timeframe	Full mobility plan to be agreed and provided which will be mirrored across the subsequent homes.	Ofsted have responded very positively to the prioritisation process of local need and are powering through the registration process. This is incredibly positive for us, but it could "backfire" in that the building is due to be finalised and handed over in Early March. Juno are getting advice as to whether Ofsted would register the home in lieu of formal handover, the only sticking point may be if a fire risk assessment and other health and safety elements can be completed in time, etc
Provisional lease agreement signed with Plus Dane, full lease to be signed following works	Work ongoing to identify suitable children for the home and this will be finalised when the registration timeline is clearer.	
Registered Manager appointed and started in post		
Ofsted registration (SC1) submitted		

TBC – Juno Widnes (Spring/Summer 2025)

Progress Report	Action Log	Risks and Mitigations
<p>Juno to purchase using a combination of UK-SPF grant funding and low-cost borrowing- bid. Funding via the Postcode Innovation Trust has also been secured to fund the material side of the development.</p> <p>Consideration has been made around the possibility of 2 alternative solo provisions, however, risks around stagnation and care planning rapidly disregarded this plan.</p> <p>Registered Manager out for advert.</p>	<p>Offer placed using the UKSPF Funding on https://www.rightmove.co.uk/properties/162509897#/?channel=RES_BUY and accepted. This has recently been withdrawn by the vendor.</p> <p>Planning application is submitted and awaiting consultation for us to support and encourage through, this has also had to be withdrawn, and other properties are being explored.</p> <p>Full mobilisation plan to be developed using the Summer Lane template.</p>	<p>N/A</p>

TBC – Childrens Home (Late 2025/Early 2026)

Progress Report	Action Log	Risks and Mitigations
Initial proposals centered around refurbishment of Edinburgh Road. This was not deemed feasible.	Working with CSAM around capital request	Funding for works to property needs to be agreed and approved through the CSAM
Internal property search complete, no properties identified	Viewings ongoing to identify a suitable property	The timeliness of this is critical to have the funds in place and progress the purchase as a cash buyer. The ideal property may be available now, with no funds in place.
Planning underway to purchase suitable property	Full mobilisation plan to be developed using the Summer Lane template.	

Rutland Street – Childrens Home (2028)

Progress Report	Action Log	Risks and Mitigations
Overall development project progressing (subject to final funding approval by Homes England)	Ongoing engagement between architects and Juno/HBC	Originally planned to be delivered through the CHT. Initial funding through land value not feasible- funding for works to property needs to be agreed and approved through the CSAM.
Initial plans drawn up to include Children's Home (detached, up to six bedrooms)	Funding needs to be incorporated into the CSAM via ICENI.	Planning permission is not guaranteed and may not be granted
Current estimate for build to range between £450,000-£500,000		

Maya Court – Care Leavers Foyer/Training Flats (2026)

Progress Report	Action Log	Risks and Mitigations
<p>The Grangeway development will be managed by Childrens Commissioning on behalf of Community Safety.</p> <p>Report has been passed through MT around the combined support specification for the whole site, however, it is unclear if Adults will manage this, or if this will fall to Childrens.</p>	<p>Finalise plans around commissioning responsibility for Grangeway and, if needed, and formalise the additionality in terms of resources required.</p> <p>Work with Riverside to negotiate the management agreement of Maya Court and the transfer to Childrens.</p> <p>Incorporate the support element of Maya Court into the existing specification for Lavender/Park House.</p>	<p>There is no integrated commissioning approach in Halton, which means that only Childrens and Adults Services have dedicated commissioning support.</p> <p>Departments and directorates such as Community Safety do not, and therefore, this workload is being disseminated into Childrens. There are plans to formalise this with Community Safety, however, these are not yet clear.</p> <p>This delay is impacting on the Supported Accommodation Contract in place with P3 and an extension has now been agreed.</p>

Old Town – Care Leavers Foyer (2028)

Progress Report	Action Log	Risks and Mitigations
Initial design phase and business case complete- works estimated to cost c.3.5 million Business case based on c. 1.5 million worth of grant funding, however further 2 million would need to be agreed (borrowed) to deliver the project. Meeting taken place with Commissioning and Regen to discuss the ongoing viability of the project in relation to cost v benefit.	£48,000 needed to move the project to the next stage RIBA 3 design phase Decision needs to be made around whether the project is ongoing or if the project is terminated.	Significant funding shortfall - funding would need to be agreed and borrowed circa £2.3 million RIBA stages 3 and 4 will be costly. Costs may increase given the building status and planning permission may be refused Becoming more apparent that this is unfeasible on many levels and is more in line with the Town Plan rather than Childrens Sufficiency.

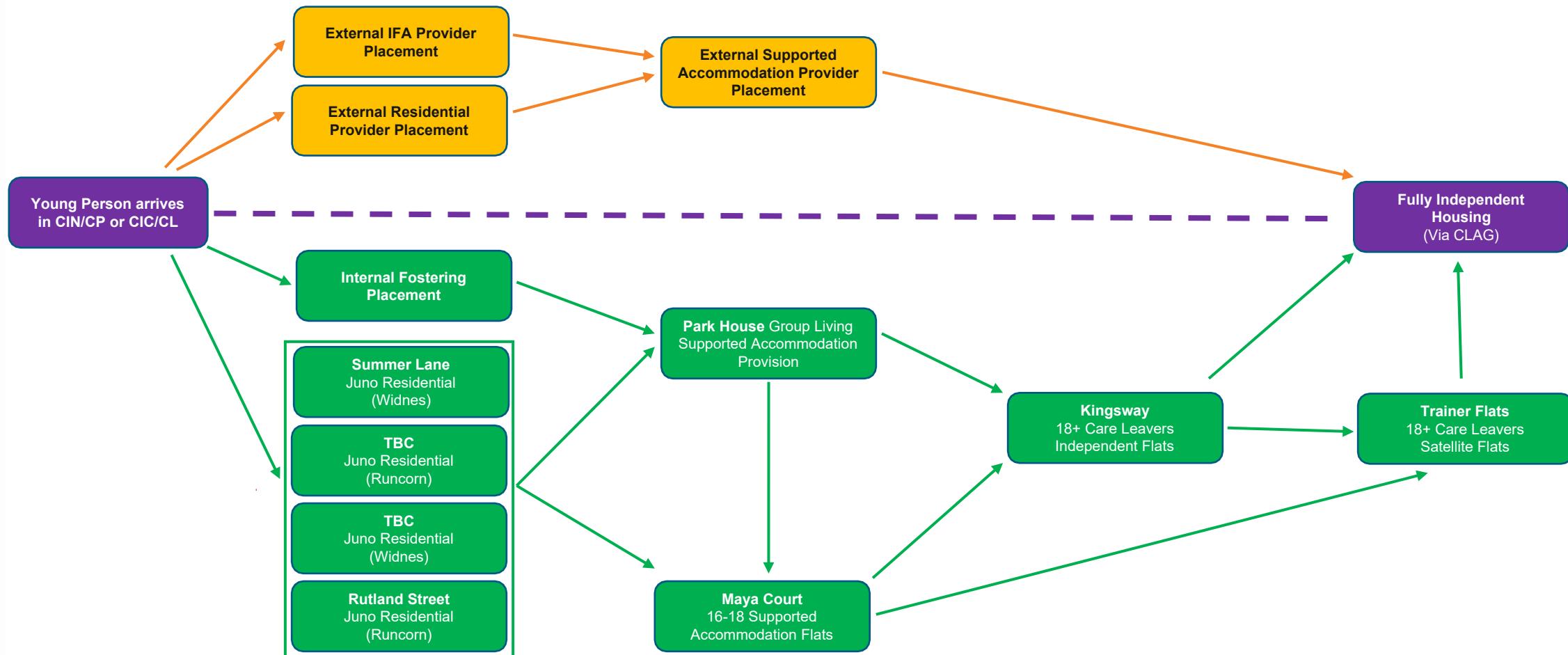
Fairfield- Care Leavers Hub

Progress Report	Action Log	Risks and Mitigations
<p>Development of a Care Leavers Hub proposed, based on a hybrid model of The Hive in Camden and Sefton's recent development.</p> <p>Funding of £65,000 for initial design and feasibility costs secured via Juno through UK-SPF funding and additional funding available through Pathways Team for white goods.</p> <p>Community donations and business collaboration (John Lewis, etc) available for furnishings and amenities.</p> <p>Permission to use the Fairfield property for Care Leavers Hub has been requested</p>	<p>Finalise the decision on Fairfield, and if not an option, source a different venue.</p> <p>Decide whether the funding should be utilised elsewhere and abandon the Hub.</p> <p> Welcome to The Hub  Our new Care Experienced Hub was officially opened yesterday on the first day of #CareLeaversWeek Lots of hard work has gone into making this place a beautiful home from home where young people can find the help they need in a space they feel comfortable, safe and supported! The Hub will offer a chance to speak to dedicated teams who have in depth knowledge of care experienced people and the support they are entitled to. The Hub will also host social events and foster a community among care experienced people in Sefton. The Hub represents a commitment to our young people this #CareLeaversWeek  Read more here https://ow.ly/gobz50TV6w0 Keep an eye out on socials for more fun content from The Hub! Sefton Council Facebook</p>	<p>Property for project can not be secured in a timely fashion, and the funding is redistributed to another area.</p>

Kingsway– Care Leavers Flats (18+) and Specialist Housing (2028)

Progress Report	Action Log	Risks and Mitigations
https://haltongovuk.sharepoint.com/:w/s/region/ERIareKHjOFOmaZO9Nkc2-UBUNcbBQHbHWInIGIkuKQRyw?e=6b32tF	<p>Continue to work with Housing on developing the plans for both provisions.</p> <p>Continue to have input alongside Adults Commissioning in relation to developing the offer and to support the integrated commissioning of the support elements where needed.</p>	<p>There is no integrated commissioning approach in Halton, which means that Childrens and Adults Commissioning work in silo. There is no Head of Service role within Adults Commissioning, therefore the conduit for collaboration is currently via the interim Director of Commissioning and Provision.</p> <p>An introductory meeting is planned for w/c 17/10/25 to scope out plans and discuss opportunities.</p>

Typical Journey through Halton's Sufficiency Model





REPORT TO:	Children, Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board
DATE:	19 th January 2026
REPORTING OFFICER:	Executive Director of Children's Services
PORTFOLIO:	Children, Young People and Families
SUBJECT:	Quality Assurance Overview Reports Quarter 1 and Quarter 2, 2025/26
WARD(S)	Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 These quarterly overview reports are created to

- provide an overview of quality assurance activity undertaken by Children's Social Care
- provide insight into the quality of practice and service delivery
- identify key activities that will be undertaken to improve the quality of frontline practice and service user experience

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That the Policy and Performance Board

- 1) Receive the Q1 and Q2 report, consider the information and raise any questions or points for clarification; and
- 2) Highlight any areas of interest and/or concern where further information is to be reported at a future meeting of the Board.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Departmental objectives provide a clear statement on what services are planning to achieve and to show how they contribute to the Council's strategic priorities. Such information is central to the Council's performance management arrangements, and the Policy and Performance Board has a key role in monitoring performance and strengthening accountability.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There is no policy implications associated with this report.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There is no policy implications associated with this report.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children & Young People in Halton

Have a strong and robust framework for identifying and responding across all agencies is key to supporting children and young people, and partners are clear about their responsibilities and role in working together.

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

Having a strong and robust framework to ensure that children, young people, and families are supported in their learning and future employment and skills development.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

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

6.4 A Safer Halton

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

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 Not applicable.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 Not applicable.

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 within the meaning of the Act.

Children's Services Quality Assurance summary for ISC Board



Introduction

This report has been created to help the Improving Services to Children Board understand quality assurance activity undertaken by Children's Services, HBC in the quarter.

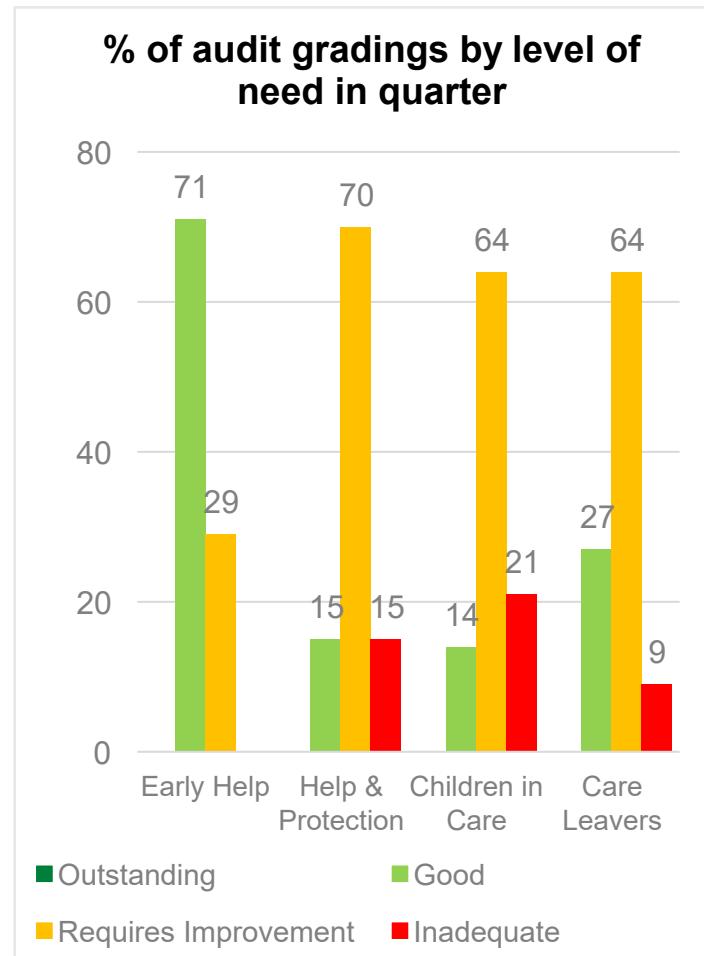
This report covers:

- Grading of audit with comparator data for understanding trend, including break down by level of need
- Moderation activity including outcome of moderation
- Summary of strengths and progress identified in the quarter
- Areas that are continued areas of focus
- Actions being undertaken

This report **covers Q1 2025-26 (April – June 2025)**. The report covers the activity undertaken against the monthly deep dive case audit programme by Early Help and Children's Social Care, monthly iCART multi-agency audits and thematic audits undertaken during the quarter. Any findings from ad hoc managers quality assurance activity undertaken is also included in the summary of strengths and progress, areas of focus and actions being undertaken.

Monthly Audit Programme

During the period Q1 2025-26 (April – June 2025) 65 audits have been completed across Early Help and Children's Social Care.



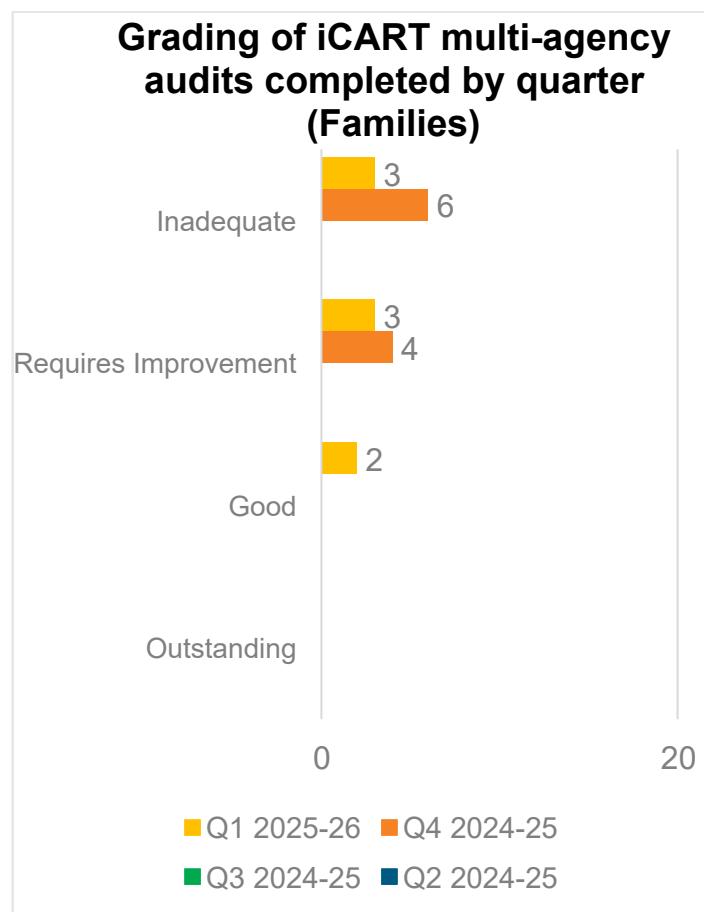
Moderations

This quarter 32 audits were subject to moderation. Of these 9 had their grading changed through moderation (28% of the audits moderated).

Original grading of audit	# Retained original grading after moderation	# Changed grading after moderation
Outstanding	1	1 Good 0 RI 0 Inadequate
Good	14	0 Outstanding 7 RI 0 Inadequate
Requires Improvement	12	0 Outstanding 0 Good 2 Inadequate
Inadequate	6	0 Outstanding 0 Good 0 RI

Monthly multi-agency iCART audits

During the period **Q1 2025-26 (April – June 2025)** **8 families** were subject to multi-agency iCART audits.



Thematic audits & ad hoc manager quality assurance activity

During the period **Q1 2025-26 (April – June 2025)** the following thematic audits have been completed:

- Placement With parents (PWP) 10 children across 7 families.
- Prevention of Homelessness and Provision of Accommodation for 16 and 17 Year Olds who may be homeless and/or Require Accommodation; and Duty to Refer – 3 children
- Under 2's - engagement and support of Fathers (11 children)

Additionally, during the period, the following ad hoc manager quality assurance activity has been completed:

- Voice of the child, making good decisions and providing effective help
- QA of children's plans
- Quality and strength of the child's views in visit records and their contribution in CIN reviews
- Dip sampling of placement requests for children in care
- Observation of practice ASYE SW visit
- Reviewed the IRM Footprint and impact in respect of the completion of Private Fostering Assessments and Arrangements. (4 children)
- Dip sample of the initial visit from the IRO to children (10 Children)
- Review of CP categories at ICPC (6 families)
- Review of overdue assessments for CIC (92 Children)
- Children not seen alone 4 years plus on CIN, CP or CIC plans

Areas of Strength identified through quality assurance activity

- Timely response to risk
- Assessment captures the lived experience of children
- Quality of assessment - evidence of well written assessments, voice of the child is increasingly stronger on file Early help continues to have no audits graded as inadequate.
- For the audits with an overall grade of RI, there are some pockets of good practice captured within the sub-gradings
- 14 of 16 (87.5%) children subject to reaudit had improved practice and gradings
- Early help continues to evidence good practice in terms of direct work and engaging with children and their families
- Management oversight drives plans and gives clear directions to workers to best support families in reflective supervision
- Management oversight that is timely and evidencing scrutiny of risk is evident alongside prompt response to those children needing immediate support and risk management via strategy meetings and s47
- Social workers are evidencing relationship-based practice that is having a positive impact, and this is supported by family feedback
- Evidence of stronger voice of the child
- Timely PEP meetings, direct work with children, good relationship-based practice for our CIC

Feedback Quotes from family

- **I've learnt it is ok to reach out and ask for help. The worker's openness and honesty has allowed me to make decisions throughout our time together and for the future. Aswell as protecting and safeguarding around my child, I have felt fully supported both practically and emotionally**
- I was expecting someone to talk down to me, especially being a man, but SW didn't do that. I feel trust in her which is something I like, she seems really nice
- **I like MAP. It means agencies are accountable**
- Go in as a victim ... come outs as a survivor - it was (Worker's) referral and the "Best thing ever"
- **I just want to say SW is a brilliant social worker she took time to help me and understand and work through the situation and was very truthful with what she was saying about the process**
- They have made a huge amount of difference, I've been able to develop into the adult I am today, and my worker has aided that journey quite considerably and I owe him a lot for that
- **I find having a PA amazing!**



Areas of learning and development identified through quality assurance activity

- Threshold application to be consistent
- Actions within planning are not always SMART
- Supervision is not always reflective or driving planning for children and young people
- Changes in Social Worker is a common denominator in audits graded as inadequate
- Supervision and management oversight remains a targeted area to achieve sustained improvement
- Father inclusive practice needs to be strengthened across all service areas
- Chronologies need to be improved and purposeful
- Case summaries need attention on a regular basis to include accurate information and contingency planning
- Direct work to be included on children's records with context and meaning
- Management grip and oversight in improving and driving outcomes
- Positive relationship-based practice is needed to drive improving outcomes for children and their families.

Feedback Quotes from family



- Social Worker didn't always return my calls
- Plan some visits further in advance to allow Child to prepare please
- Answer text messages in timely way and Shared holiday dates (when SW is on AL)
- C has had many different social workers in her life

Our response to quality assurance findings

The full service reflect on findings from quality assurance at monthly Aiming High meetings. From this actions are identified to ensure that good practice is embedded across the full service, or areas of learning and development are responded to with actions that the full service can use to support consistency of practice.

In the last quarter the following key actions have been identified for action as a result of quality assurance:

Action agreed	Lead	Timescale
Review Tri-X documentation and Practice Standards to ensure aligned to improve consistency in practice for visiting timescales for CP children.	Kadie Molyneux	September 2025

Children's Services Quality Assurance summary for ISC Board



Introduction

Q2 2025-26 (July – Sept 2025).

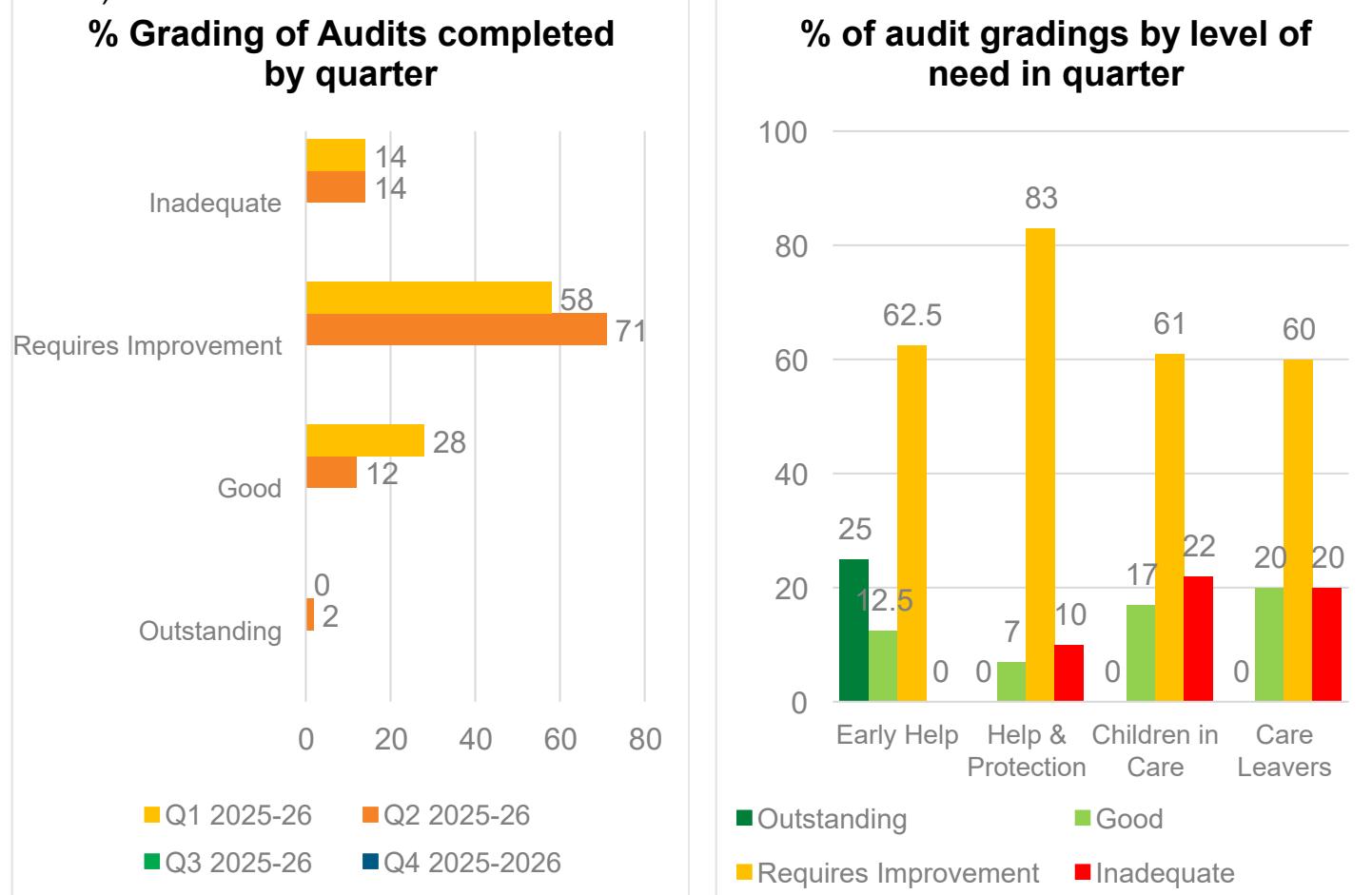
This report has been created to help the Improving Services to Children Board understand quality assurance activity undertaken by Children's Services, HBC in the quarter.

This report covers:

- Grading of deep dive audits with comparator data for understanding trend, including break down by level of need
- Moderation activity including outcome of moderation
- Monthly ICART multi agency audits
- Thematic audits
- Overview of findings from Team and Service Manager QA activity
- Summary of strengths and progress identified in the quarter
- Areas that are continued areas of focus
- Actions being undertaken to improve practice

Monthly Audit Programme

During the period Q2 2025-26 (July – Sept 2025) **66** audits have been completed across Early Help and Children's Social Care. (EH 8; H&P 30; CIC 18; CL 10)



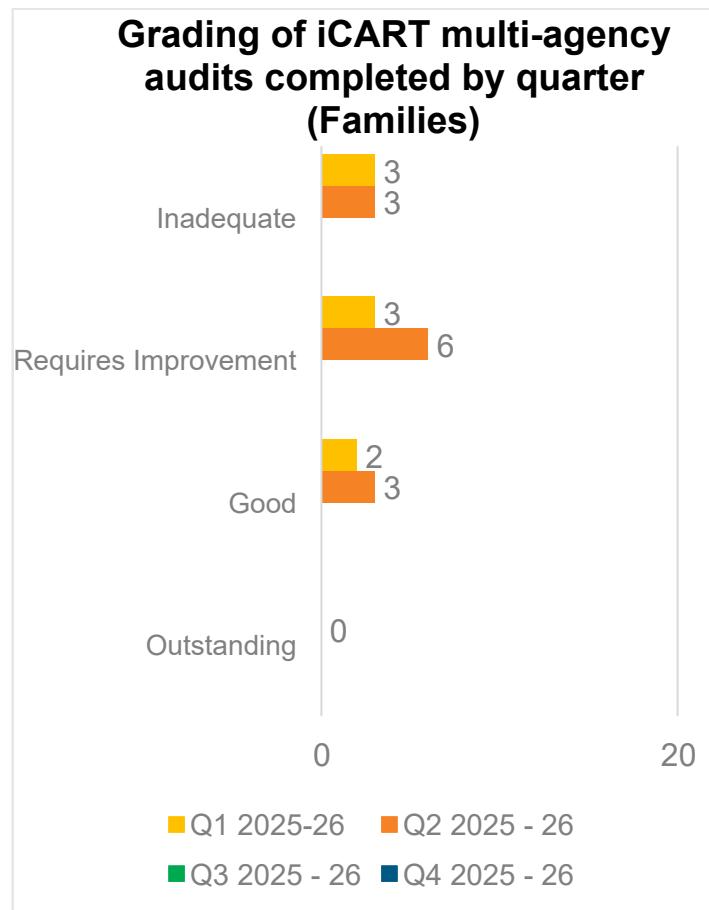
Moderations

This quarter 45 audits were subject to moderation. Of these 8 had their grading changed through moderation (19% of the audits moderated prev Q1 was 28%).

	Original grading of moderated audit	Grading after moderation
Outstanding	2	2 retained outstanding
Good	13	6 Good 6 RI 1 Inadequate
Requires Improvement	23	22 Requires Improvement 1 Inadequate
Inadequate	7	7 Inadequate

Monthly multi-agency iCART audits

During the period Q2 2025-26 (July – Sept 2025) **8 families** were considered during multi-agency iCART audits.



Thematic audits & ad hoc manager quality assurance activity

During the period Q2 2025-26 (July – Sept 2025) the following thematic audits have been completed:

- Fostering: 8 fostering families were considered during audit, caring for 13 children
- Life story work: 22 children's records audited

Additionally, during the period, the following quality assurance activity has been completed by managers within their service areas:

- QA of children's plans
- Children in Care Plans. Scrutiny of children's 2nd review to explore whether permanence plan was confirmed.
- Contingency plan detailed on core group meeting record.
- Review of actions in CP plan and within CIN meeting
- CIN review: Duration of CSC involvement 12months plus – does this involvement remain appropriate
- Children's CIN plans

Areas of Strength identified through quality assurance activity

- Examples of Outstanding practice identified within Early Help services. Early help continues to evidence good practice in terms of direct work and engaging with children and their families
- Early help subgrades all show upward trajectory.
- Timely response to risk - DAT
- Quality of assessment - evidence of well written assessments, voice of the child is increasingly stronger on file
- DAT - evidence of visiting frequency being led by consideration of the child's individual circumstances
- Increasing number of audits RI with green shoots of good practice within sub gradings.
- No audits graded as inadequate across the service September 2025
- 5 out of 6 (83%) children's records subject to reaudit had improved practice and gradings
- CIN - Significance of risks posed is well understood and appropriate safety plans in place for children
- The number of gradings of Inadequate in Help and Protection and Children in Care audits is decreasing. There were no inadequate audits in August and September for Care Leavers.
- Voice of the child is improving particularly in Children in Care audits
- Social workers are evidencing relationship-based practice that is having a positive impact, and this is supported by family feedback
- There is evidence of timely PEP meetings, direct work with children, good relationship-based practice for our children in care.

Feedback Quotes from family

Feedback provided by mum states that she felt listened to by the social worker. SW made it as easy as possible in a difficult situation. Worker listens and doesn't push things on me. Worker listens to me and has made this involvement easy she has involved G's dad as well.

G is a baby, but worker has seen him many times and has noticed his development changes and told me this. 10/10 in all (but one) areas.

Mum - Thank you for all the life changing support, it has impacted my life massively. I will always be extremely grateful".

School feel the plan is helping the child and their family. Attendance is improving and positive behaviour in school.

Child – “The social worker believed me when I told her what was happening” “I’m getting more help; I’m involved I attend meetings and know what is happening”

Dad scored the social worker 10/10 as every concern child had the social worker has listened to and child understands. That the worker noticed when things are going well and that the social worker cares about the family and making changes.

Police when asked if communication is good - Yes, very much so, with the managers and SW's in DAT and iCART especially.

Areas of learning and development identified through quality assurance activity

- When recording on children's files practitioners need to be mindful of language. Social work general statements can appear 'blaming' when read back.
- Grade descriptors need to be linked to audits to support auditor's conclusion and grading
- The timeliness and quality of visits remains variable.
- Quality of supervision remains an area that requires focussed improvement.
- The consistency and quality of chronologies need improvement
- Contingency plans/updated case summaries (need to include all parents, relevant carers and professionals) need to be on files and regularly reviewed
- Genogram's need to be consistently recorded
- Case summaries and pen pictures need to be recent, with context and detail.
- EHCP's need to be on children's records and include the most recent review to ensure SW can link to PEP's and that children's plans are all aligned
- Staff turnover impacts on relationship building for children and their families as well as progression of the child's plan
- Life story work is not consistently evident on children's records
- IRO footprint is not always recorded in between reviews.
- Drift and delay in planning is still evident for some children

Feedback Quotes from family



- **"She's always there when I need her and she's always gets back to me, whereas some social workers don't respond"**
- **Mum expressed her frustrations with people (social workers) coming in and out of her and child's life and not doing anything because child "behaves for a few weeks"**
- **Child – "this worker has been really helpful and more helpful than some of the others I have had who have not been great."**
- **Feel "a bit unsure about what happens next in terms of PA support?"**

Our response to quality assurance findings

The full service reflect on findings from quality assurance at monthly Aiming High meetings. From this actions are identified to ensure that good practice is embedded across the full service, or areas of learning and development are responded to with actions that the full service can use to support consistency of practice.

In the last quarter the following key actions have been identified for action as a result of quality assurance:

Action agreed	Lead	Timescale	Page
Service Managers will collectively agree what a good chronology looks like. What we will expect to see on a child's file at each stage of their journey through the continuum of need. How this will become embedded in practice. When we will begin to see improved practice emerge and how we will test this out.	Lisa Riley	TBC	83
Quality and purposefulness of visits is inconsistent, particularly those undertaken by a Duty Social Worker 1. Before the next AH meeting, Service Managers will explore within their respective areas the obstacles to achieving consistently good, purposeful visits. 2. Lisa Riley to provide a written summary to Service Managers of previous agreements around Duty SW visits. 3. Service Managers to begin to formulate a service wide plan to improve the quality of visits which is focussed on the identified barriers and bring back to November AH meeting. 4. Good practice examples to be shared with Service Manager group	1. All service managers 2. Lisa Riley 3. All service managers 4. QA Lynette Lofthouse & SWA	AH Nov 2025	
We don't currently align all of the plans for individual children 1. There are already plans underway to align MFH and EHCP. This work will continue. 2. -The alignment of children's plans will be a priority action in the implementation plan for the Family Safeguarding Model;	1. Michelle McPherson and Kate Chorlton 2. Matthew Brown.	1. TBC 2. the implementation plan is due for completion by December 2025	7

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

DATE: 19 January 2026

REPORTING OFFICER: Finance Director

PORTFOLIO: Corporate Services

SUBJECT: Councilwide Spending as at 30 November 2025

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To report the Council's overall revenue spending position as at 30 November 2025, together with the latest year-end outturn forecast.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That;

(i) **The Council's overall spending position as at 30 November 2025 outlined in the Appendix, be noted.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 On 15 January 2026 the Executive Board received the report shown in the Appendix. This presented details of Councilwide revenue spending by each Department as at 30 November 2025 along with forecasts to year-end, and outlines the reasons for key variances between spending and budget.

3.2 Given the scale of the Council's current financial challenges, Executive Board requested that a copy of the report be shared with each Policy and Performance Board for information.

3.3 A Councilwide monitoring report is presented to Executive Board every two months and the attached report covers the period 1 April 2024 to 30 November 2025 in terms of revenue and capital spending.

3.4 Within the report, Appendix 1 provides a Councilwide summary of revenue spending, while Appendix 2 presents details relating to each Department. In addition to spending as at 30 November 2025, the latest year-end forecasts of variances between revenue spending and budget are provided.

3.5 Appendix 3 outlines the forecast deficit on the schools high needs budget.

3.6 Appendix 4 indicates progress with implementation of previously approved budget savings for 2024/25 and 2025/26. Appendix 4 presents an update of the budget risk register.

3.7 Appendix 5 presents spending to date against the capital programme.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

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

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

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

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

5.5 **Working Towards a Greener Future**

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

There are no direct implications, however, the revenue budget and capital programme support the delivery and achievement of all the Council's priorities.

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

6.1 There are a number of financial risks within the budget. However, the Council has internal controls and processes in place to ensure that spending remains in line with budget as far as possible.

6.2 A budget risk register of significant financial risks is maintained and is included at Appendix 6 of the attached report.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 None.

8.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1072

9.1 There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act

APPENDIX

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 15 January 2026

REPORTING OFFICER: Director of Finance

PORTFOLIO: Corporate Services

SUBJECT: 2025/26 Councilwide Spending as at 30 November 2025

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.2 To report the Council's overall revenue net spend position as at 30 November 2025 together with a 2025/26 forecast outturn position.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That;

- (ii) Executive Directors continue to implement the approved 2025/26 saving proposals as detailed in Appendix 4;
- (iii) Executive Directors continue to identify areas where they can further reduce their directorate's spending or generate income, in order to ensure the council wide forecast outturn overspend position for the year remains within budget.
- (iv) This report be shared with each Policy and Performance Board, in order to ensure they have a full appreciation of the councilwide financial position, in addition to their specific areas of responsibility.
- (v) Council be asked to approve the revisions to the capital programme set-out in paragraph 3.31 and incorporated within Appendix 5;
- (vi) The forecast position for High Needs set-out in Para 3.19 to 3.24 and Appendix 3, be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Revenue Spending

3.1 Appendix 1 presents a summary of spending against the operational revenue budget up to 30 November 2025 (period 8) and Appendix 2 provides detailed figures for each individual Department. In overall terms,

net Council spending as at 30 November 2025 is £0.294m over budget. The outturn forecast for the year estimates that net spending will be over budget by £1.281m if no further corrective action is taken. This is a much improved position from that reported at the end of September 2025 (period 6) where forecast spend for the year was estimated to be £4.672m over budget.

3.2 The improved position on the forecast outturn from that reported at the end of September 2025 can be linked across a number of areas, including:

- Adult Social Care Directorate – The forecast outturn position for Community Care is £0.683m at the end of November, compared to a forecast outturn of £2.315m from two months prior. The position has improved due to more flexible utilisation of the Disabled Facility Grant (DFG) through the capitalisation of qualifying staffing and equipment costs against the grant, which it is intended to continue for future years.
- Care Homes - The overspending forecast against the Council's in-house care homes has decreased by a further £0.218m as a result of a lower forecast of agency spend, stemming from the ongoing review of sickness absence. Overall the Adult Social Care forecast outturn position has improved by £1.723m.
- Children and Families Department – The outturn position for the Department has improved by £1.601m. Employee costs are forecast to be under budget profile by the end of financial year 2025/26 by £0.096m which is a reduction of £0.822m since last reported at 30 September 25. Residential care costs are forecast to be under budget profile by £0.513m which is a reduction of £0.571m since last reported on 30 September 25.
- Environment and Regeneration Directorate – The forecast outturn position for the Directorate has improved by £1.006m. This is largely as a result of revised forecasts of income generation within the Planning and Transportation department, related to planning fees and the number of approved utility permit applications.

3.3 Despite the reduction in forecast net costs for the year it remains vital the Council continue to limit expenditure through to the end of the financial year to achieve as a minimum, a balanced budget position. It should be remembered that in setting the current year budget the Council have planned to utilise £29.385m of Exceptional Financial Support.

3.4 As part of the action to ensure spend for the year remains within budget, recovery meetings have been put into action where directorate leads will provide action points on how they aim to keep net spend within the approved budget.

3.5 On 10 February 2025 Government issued a letter to the Council confirming it was minded to approve a capitalisation direction of a total not exceeding £52.8 million. The total is broken down by each financial year of the Council's request:

- £20.8 million in 2024-25.
- £32 million in 2025-26.

3.6 Consistent with those councils that have previously sought Exceptional Financial Support, in order for Government to provide a final capitalisation direction, the council is required to undergo an external assurance review which will include, but will not be limited to, an assessment of the council's financial position and governance arrangements. There is uncertainty in when MHCLG will commission this review and therefore the Council has taken a proactive approach and commissioned CIPFA to support a review of the Council's financial resilience and financial management arrangements. The review is currently being undertaken on the same basis of the latest specification for such reviews required by MHCLG for councils requesting EFS.

3.7 Council approved the annual budget of £183.052m on 05 March 2025, in doing so they agreed to the use of EFS totalling £29.385m. As a minimum the Council must ensure that spend for the year remains within the approved budget to ensure the provisional capitalisation direction is not breached.

3.8 The cost of EFS is significant over the long term for the Council, for every £1m borrowing undertaken it is estimated will cost the Council approximately £100k over each of the next 20 years. It is imperative action is taken now to reduce the level of planned spend over the remainder of the year and that approved saving proposals are implemented with immediate effect.

3.9 Within the Corporate and Democracy table (included at Appendix B), current year costs relating to EFS have been included. It is forecast the cost of EFS interest will be £1.096m with repayment of the principal debt totalling £0.500m

3.10 The figures reflect a prudent yet realistic view of spend and income levels through to the end of the year. Work will continue to progress on updating the financial position as more information is made available.

3.11 In setting the 2025/26 budget Council approved significant levels of growth to ensure the budget was more relevant to the planned level of spend. Budget growth of £33.555m (22%) was added to the 2025/26 budget to bring the approved net budget to £183.052m.

3.12 There are continued demand pressures on the budget which are above growth levels provided in the 2025/26 budget, these are more notable against adults community care and home to school transport. Levels of demand covering children in care appear to be under control, although still

too high for an authority the size of Halton. Further information is provided within the report on the main budgetary pressure areas.

3.13 In setting the 2025/26 budget, inflation of 2% was provided for the pay award. The pay award has been agreed at 3.2%, therefore budgetary growth for the pay award is insufficient, the revised forecast of the additional cost of the 3.2% pay offer will add approximately £1.2m to the Council's running cost for the year. This additional cost is included within the reported forecast position for the year.

3.14 Another major factor in achieving a balanced budget position for the year is that all approved savings are fully achieved to the agreed levels. In total, savings of £7.225m were agreed for the current year, Appendix 4 provides detail on progress against the approved savings. As per Appendix 4, savings have been RAG rated to inform on progress, high level summary of this is provided below.

Department	On-course to be achieved	Uncertain or too early to say	Highly likely or certain will not be achieved
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Adult Social Care	100	125	1,655
Finance	0	100	90
Legal	6	0	0
Children & Family Services	0	1,900	22
Education, Inclusion and Provision	0	0	300
Community and Greenspaces	282	0	0
Economy, Enterprise and Property *	0	0	100
Planning & Transportation *	0	0	100
Public Health	45	0	0
Corporate	100	500	1900
Totals	533	2,125	4,667

*note alternative one-off savings have been identified for the current year.

3.15 The use and cost of agency staff continues to be one of the main contributing factors to the overspend position for the year. This is mostly evident within the Children & Families Department and the Council's in-house Care Homes. Initiatives and support from the Transformation Programme are ongoing to reduce reliance upon agency staff.

3.16 Analysis of agency spend for the year to date, together with comparative analysis of 2024/25 costs, is included in the table below.

	2025/26					2024/25
	As at 31 May 2025 £'000	As at 31 July 2025 £'000	As at 30 September 2025 £'000	As at 30 November 2025 £'000	Total 2025/26 To Date £'000	
Adult Social Care	955	1,687	805	573	4,020	6,035
Chief Executives Delivery Unit	130	145	146	118	539	810
Children & Family Services	574	739	594	564	2,471	5,220
Community & Greenspace	71	59	52	53	235	447
Corporate & Democracy	0	0	0	6	6	0
Economy, Enterprise & Property	60	77	86	72	295	417
Education, Inclusion & Provision	54	72	48	56	230	295
Finance	3	0	1	1	5	114
Legal & Democratic Services	63	59	43	37	202	881
Planning & Transportation	2	0	0	0	2	210
Public Health & Public Protection	0	0	0	0	0	22
Total	1,912	2,838	1,775	1,480	8,005	14,451

Revenue - Operational Spending

3.17 Operational net spending for the first eight months of the year is higher than the budget to date by £0.294m Based on current forecasts it is estimated net spend will be over budget for the year by £1.281m if no further corrective action is taken.

3.18 Within the overall budget forecast position for the period, the key budget pressure areas are as follows;

(i) Children and Families Department

The net departmental outturn position is estimated to be over budget profile at the end of financial year 2025/26 by £0.209m with the majority relating to Social Care Services. Since last reported at 30 September 25 there has been a reduction in forecast outturn for the department of £1.6m.

Employee costs are forecast to be under budget profile by the end of financial year 2025/26 by £0.096m which is a reduction of £0.822m since last reported at 30 September 25.

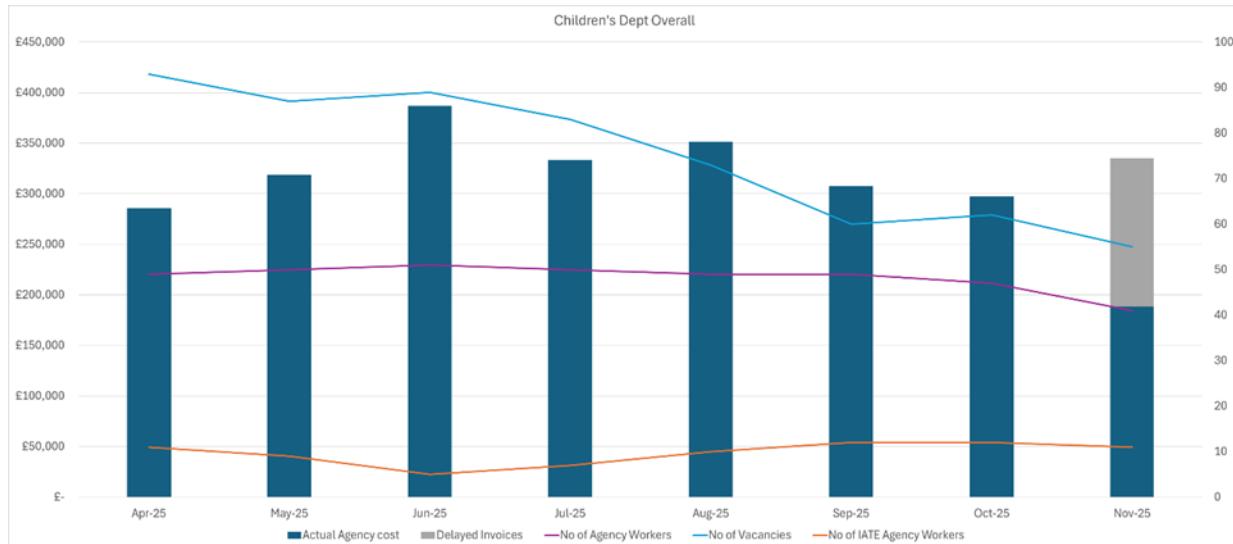
A large proportion of the reduction relates to the utilisation of a number of grants that are available to the service, this equates to £0.486m to 30 November 2025 and has supported the reduction in forecast overspend.

Since last reported on 30 September 25, a number of agency have converted to Council employment, with hopeful further planned conversions over the coming months. Forecasts will be updated as and when to reflect the changes in staffing.

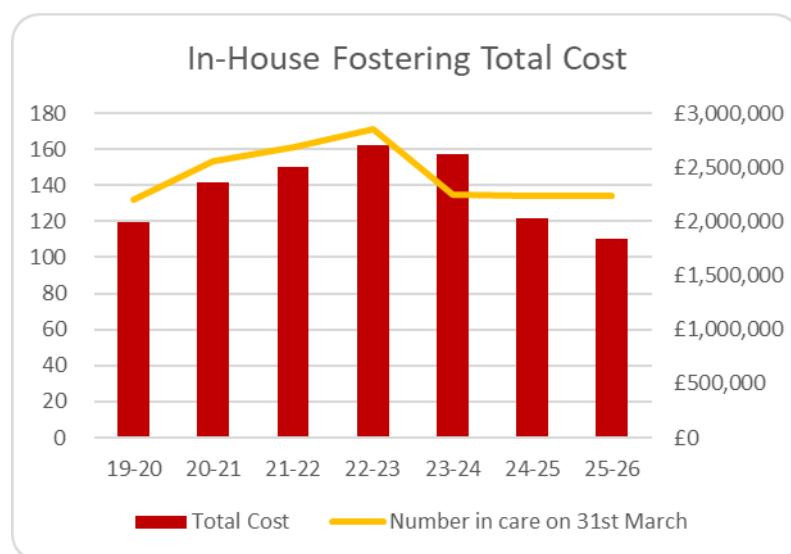
The chart below demonstrates the following information, for the period April to November 2025:

- Agency costs

- The number of agency staff that the Council have received an invoice for within each month
- The number of vacancies across the Children and Families Department
- The number of staff that are currently in addition to the establishment (IATE)



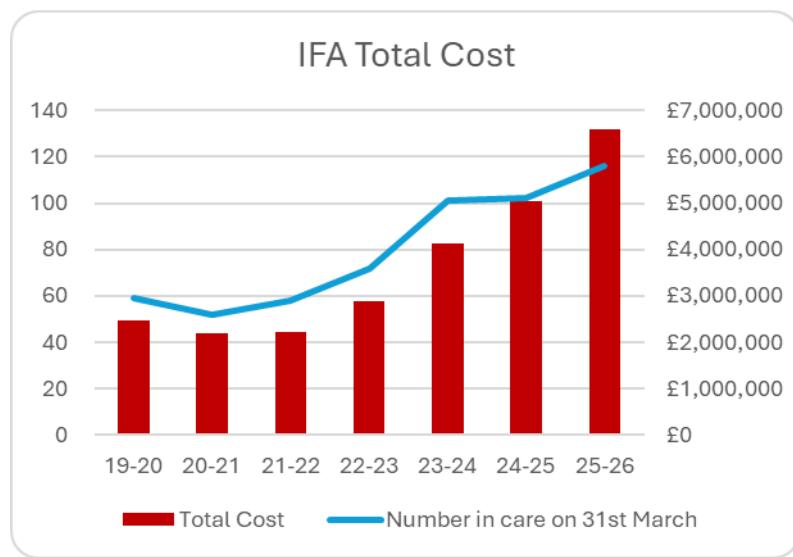
In-House fostering placements are estimated to be £0.548m under budget profile for financial year 2025/26.



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 of £1.114m.



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 under budget profile by £0.513m which is a reduction of £0.571m since last reported on 30 September 25.

A number of initiatives are taking place to help reduce residential spend, including a High Cost Placement Panel, Medium Cost Placement Panel and particular cohort focused projects. The panels have been created to ensure that an effective care plan is in place for all young people at the best available cost of placement this work is ongoing.

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.



(ii) Adult Social Care Directorate

Community Care

The net spend position for the community care budget at the end of November 2025 is currently £0.411m over the available budget and the year-end anticipated spend is forecast to be £0.683m over planned budget.

In September the expected year-end forecast was reduced from £2.627m to £2.315m due to the impact of the recovery plan. The forecast has since been reduced further to £0.683m by capitalising qualifying staffing and equipment costs against the Disabled Facility Grant (DFG) enabling revenue budget to be utilised against community care budget pressures. Additionally the pool budget has released £0.400m toward this budget's financial performance.

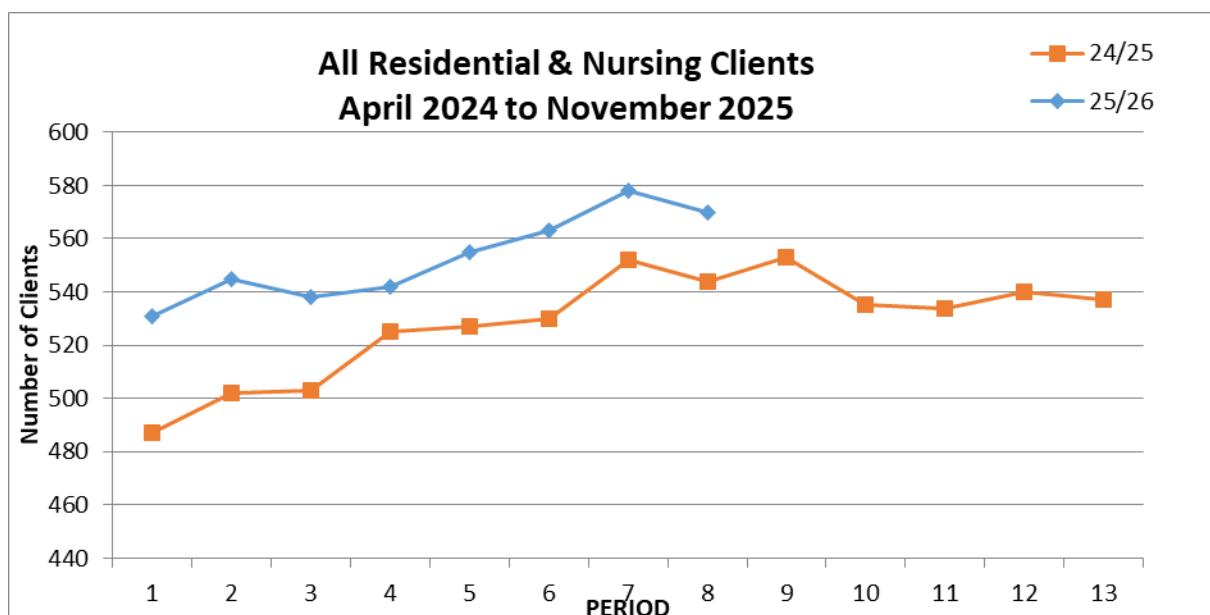
Recovery meetings continue and currently focus is on the following areas to try to reduce spend further:-

- Review 1 to 1 packages of care for appropriateness
- Identify and signpost new 15 minute packages of domiciliary care (medicine prompts) which should be commissioned and funded by health under the Care Act.
- Ensure assessments carried out on discharge from hospital are complete and appropriate
- Maximise internal care home capacity

Residential Care

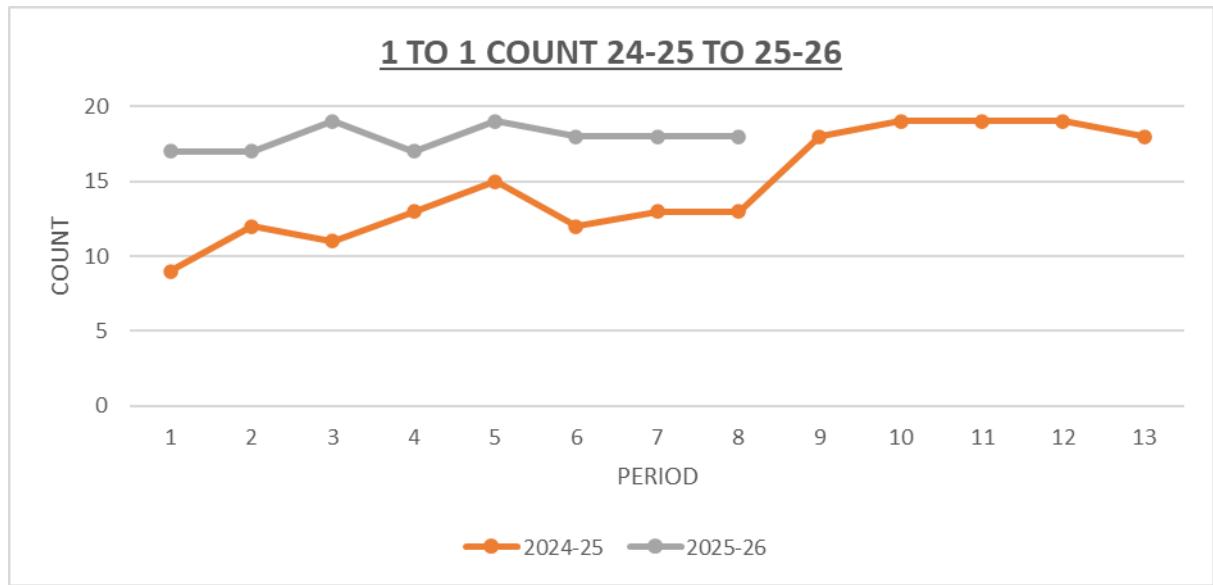
There are currently 570 residents in external residential/nursing care as at the end of November 2025. Compared to the 2024/25 average of 520 this is an increase of 9.6%. The average cost of a package of care is currently £949.76 compared to £850.24 at the end of 2024/25 an increase of 11.7%.

The graph below illustrates the demand for all residential and nursing placements.



Payments for 1 to 1 support continue to exert pressure on the budget. These are generally to mitigate the risk from falls particularly on discharge from hospital. The full year cost for 2024/25 was £837,882.

The graph below shows the count of service users receiving 1 to 1 care by period. Currently there are 18 compared to 13 at the same point last year. This is an increase of 38%. It is expected that these should reduce as packages continue to be reviewed, however commissioning of new packages with a 1:1 care element are resulting in numbers remaining high.

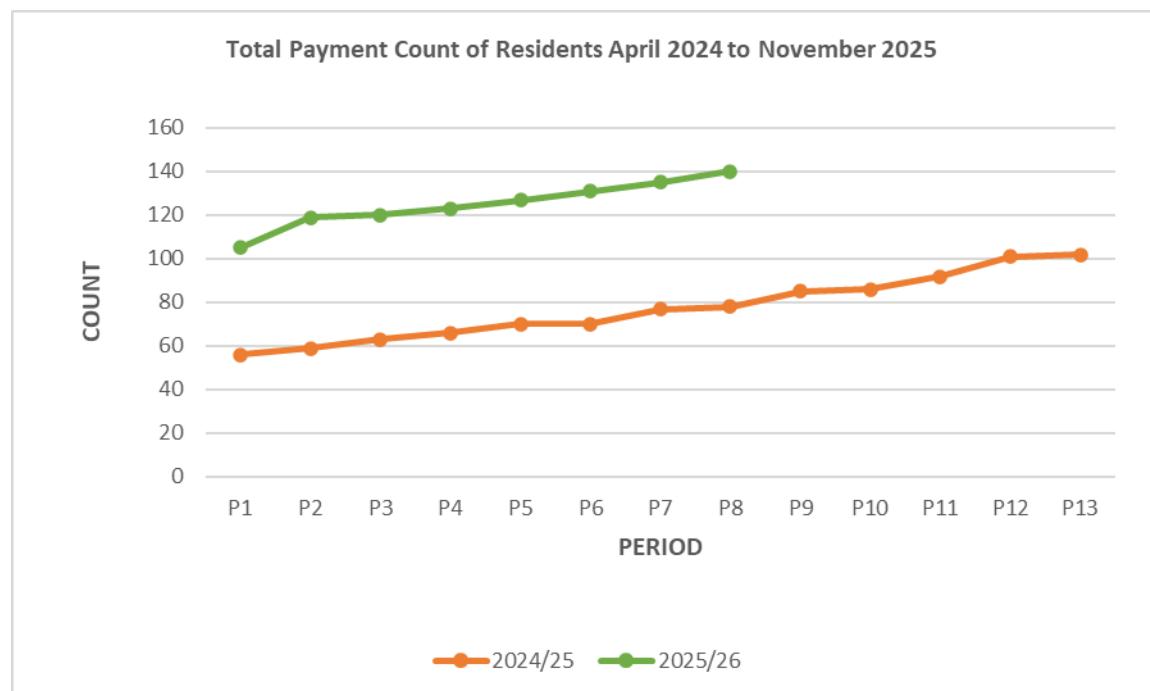


Additional Payments 2025/26

Additional payments to providers rose sharply throughout the last financial year, both in and out of the borough. These are where the care home charges an additional amount on top of the contracted bed rate. The cost of this for 2024/25 was £0.424m.

The graphs below illustrate the count and spend of service users with an additional payment by period.

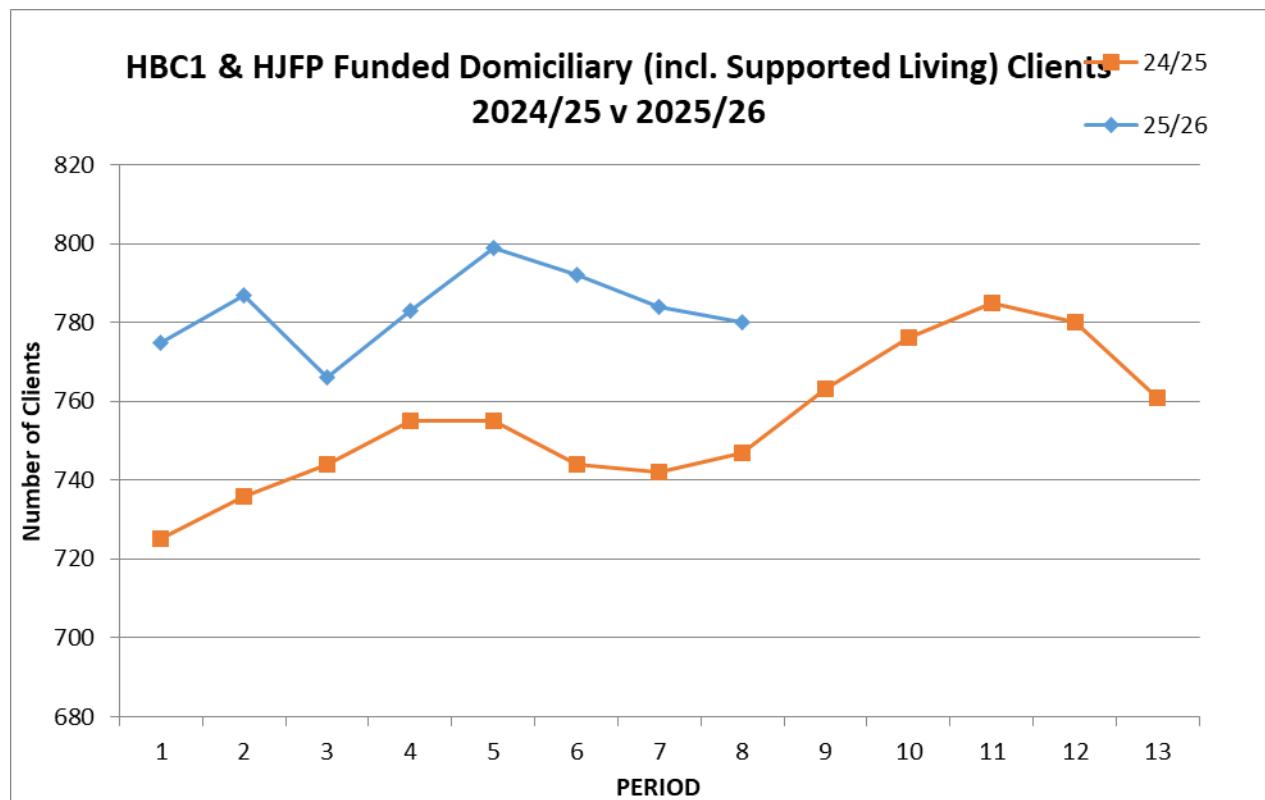
This clearly shows a steady increase in numbers and costs for 2025/26, the spend up to November is £0.405m. If numbers and costs remain the same, the forecast spend for the year will be approximately £0.696m.



Domiciliary Care & Supported Living

As at November there are 780 service users receiving a package of care at home, compared to the average in 2024/25 of 754, an increase of 3.4%. The average cost of a package of care is currently £537.15 compared with the average of £450.64 in 2024/25 an increase of 19.19%.

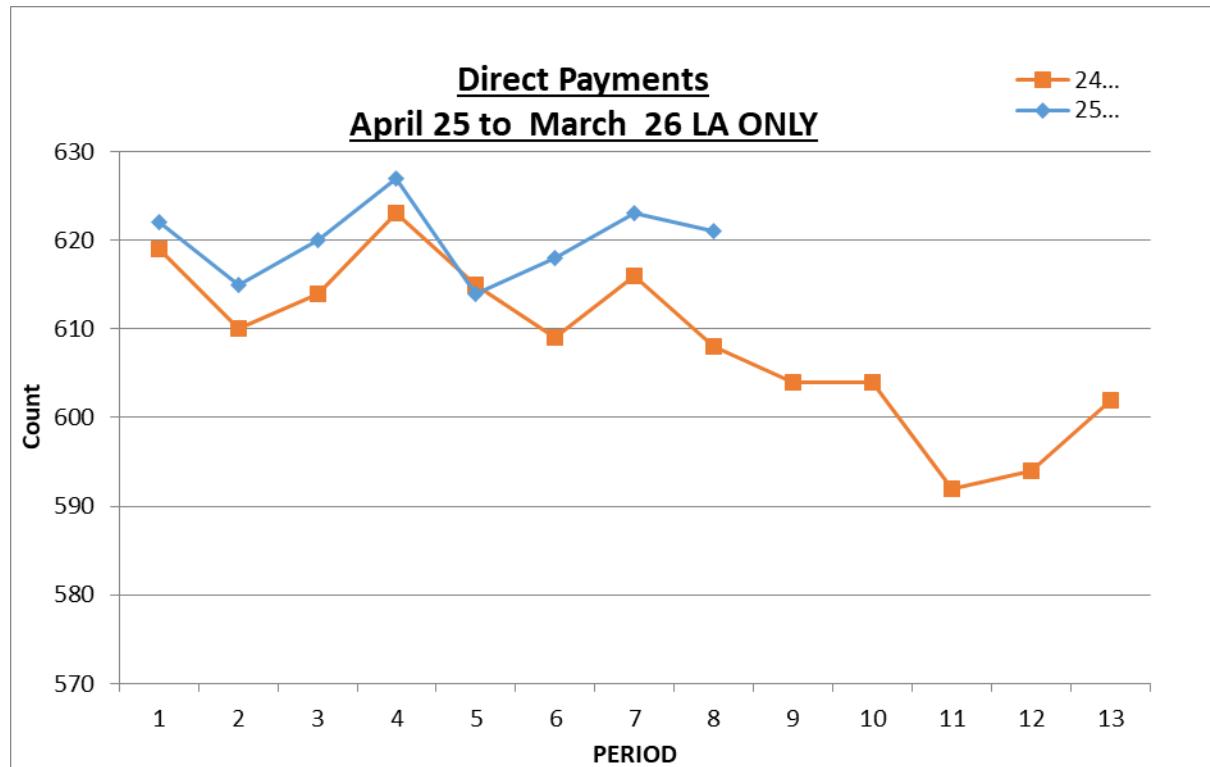
The graph below illustrates the demand for the service from April 2024 to November 2025.



Direct Payments

The average number of clients who received a Direct Payment (DP) in November was 621 compared with 622 in April, a small decrease. The average cost of a package of care has also decreased from £571.26 to £491.76, a reduction of 13.9%. The financial impact of this is a reduction in spend of approximately £200k per month.

The graph below shows movement throughout the year.



Care Homes

Spend for the first nine months of the 2025/26 Financial Year to 30 November is £0.084M above profile, with an estimated spend above budget for the year of £0.385M. This primarily relates to unbudgeted agency staffing costs, and a current shortfall against target of client finance and out of borough income.

Employee related expenditure is anticipated to be above budget at the end of financial year by £0.152M. Projections take into account agency spending patterns over the previous 3 financial years, but also with reference to the recent decrease in agency expenditure, this has dropped considerably from previously reported as a result of the ongoing review of sickness absence.

Income Targets include those for privately funded residents, out of borough placements, and reimbursements from the ICB in respect Of Continuing Health Care, Funded Nursing Care, and Joint Funded placements. Income across all headings is currently projected to be under-achieved by £0.131M for the full year.

Adult Social Care (excluding Care Homes and Community Care)

Net Department Expenditure is currently £0.609m over budget profile at the end of the sixth period of the financial year. Current expenditure projections indicate an overspend for the full financial year in the region of £0.768m.

Factors relating to the projected overspend include;

Unbudgeted agency costs in respect of covering vacant posts, particularly in terms of front line Care Management and Mental Health Team posts. However, there continues to be a reduction in agency use across these divisions due to filling of vacancies.

A projected £0.199m forecasted full-year spend above supplies and services budget relates to an increased volume of caseload with respect to Deprivation of Liberty Standards (DoLs) assessments. Spend to November 2025 was £0.132m, with a total spend for this financial year forecast at £0.217m. Demand for this service has increased significantly over the last few years, with this trend continuing throughout the current financial year.

Income as a whole is under the budgeted income target by £0.627m with a projected under achieved target at the end of the financial year being £0.668m. The main areas making up the under achievement of targeted income are Community Meals, Telehealthcare, Transport, Positive Behaviour Service and the Day Services Trading areas.

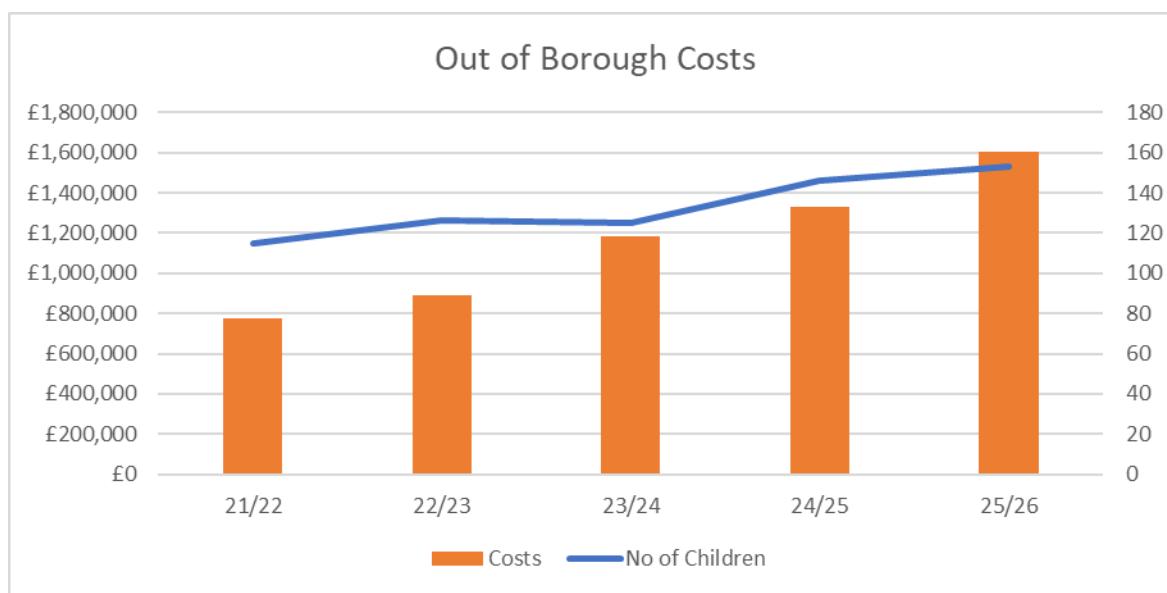
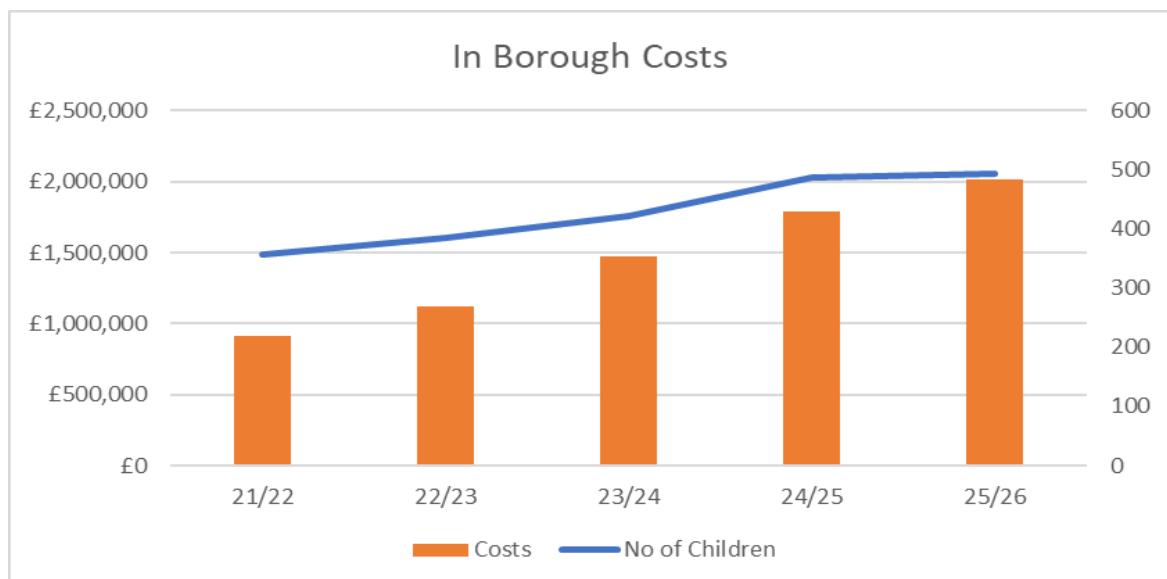
(iii) Education, Inclusion and Provision

Net departmental expenditure is £0.593m over budget at the end of November, based on available information. The forecast outturn for 2025/26 is currently an overspend against budget of £1.034m. The main variances are school transport, Inter Authority Income and schools SLA income.

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 current records show 647 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 has increased by roughly 7% since the last report, for both in and out of borough transport, although average cost per user has reduced by 6%. The graphs below show the number of SEN children using this service.

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



(iv) Planning and Transportation

As of 30th November 2025 it is forecast net spend will be £1.390m under the approved 2025/26 budget. This is a significant increase of the underspend of £0.364m forecasted at the end of September 2025. This is largely due to revised forecasts around staffing and income.

There are a large number of vacancies across the department that have not yet been filled. The Highways restructure has been taken out of the projections from the last report to now, as it is unlikely that it will be in place before March 26. This has resulted in a forecast staffing underspend of £0.487m

Overall, it is forecast income for the department will be £1.050m over the budgeted income target.

Planning income is an ever-moving area and unlike earlier reports it is now expected to be over its income target. Following on from the 2024/25 financial year there is a downturn in the number of applications being received so there is some reliance on receiving planning applications from housing developers. This forecast is based on the income that has been received so far, this financial year and what is likely to be achieved going forward. Building control income is projected to not achieve its income target as in previous years.

Fees and charges income is projected to overachieve its income target, but this is constantly in flux as it is fully dependent on the amount of permit applications etc that is received. It is anticipated that the high level of permit income that was seen in previous years will eventually drop off but for now has been consistent for the past 8 months, due to the large number of housing developers requiring permission to install utilities. There are a number of reasons for the current over achievement of permit income, including:

- The number of permits being received has been higher than usual due to several companies carrying out fibre roll outs and upgrades. This seems to be coming to an end and the number of permits relating to fibre are most likely to severely decrease for the remainder of the year.
- As a result of the increased amount of works, this also increases potential for FPNs, S74 charges and defect charges to be issued against permits. As the number of works decreases, so will the associated charges.
- There is higher than usual income associated to traffic management due to the amount of works taking place since April.
- There are more inspections now than in previous years, which has increased income.

Dedicated Schools Grant

3.19 As at 31 March 2025 the Council had a deficit on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) reserve of £14.469m. This is as an impact of the increasing demand and costs of High Needs.

3.20 The DSG deficit currently has no impact on the Council's General Fund as Government have in place an override which allows the Council to carry the deficit on its balance sheet. The override is due to end at 31 March 2028 at which point the accrued DSG deficit will have to be funded from Council resources. This is a significant pressure for a large number of local authorities with Government due to report on plans to mitigate the impact at 31 March 2028 and future funding of High Need demands.

3.21 Forecast 2025/26 costs for all anticipated demands on High Needs funding are estimated to be £42.508m, which is a substantial amount in excess of the budgeted High Needs allocation of £29.760m. After applying a 2% across-the-board increase to High Needs funding rates, the Council began the financial year anticipating a DSG shortfall of £9.4m, the first 8 months of 2025-26 have seen that increase by £3.35m.

3.22 The projected overspend is in the main due to significant expansions in numbers and specifications of resource bases, increasing numbers and costs

of high-cost specialist placements in or out of Borough, and increases in numbers and value of EHCP (Education & Health Care Plan) assessments.

- 3.23 There is a cost to the General Fund in managing the DSG deficit, this relates to the cashflow impact of a deficit position. The deficit position results in more borrowing costs for the Council which can not be allocated against DSG and therefore are coded against the General Fund. Interest costs in the current year are estimated at £0.891m
- 3.24 Appendix 3 provides detail on the High Needs 2025/26 forecast outturn position

Collection Fund

- 3.25 The council tax collection rate through to the end of November 2025 is 71.34% which is 0.09% lower than the collection rate at the same point last year.

Debt relating to previous years continues to be collected, and the Council utilises powers through charging orders and attachment to earnings/benefits to secure debts. £1.992m has so far been collected this year in relation to previous years' debt.

- 3.26 Business rate collection through to the end of November 2025 is 75.01% which is 1.02% lower than the collection rate at the same point last year.

£0.945m has so far been collected this year in relation to previous years' debt.

Review of Reserves

- 3.27 As at 30 November 2025 the Council's General Reserve is unchanged from the previous period at £5.149m, which represents 2.81% of the Council's 2025/26 net budget. This level of General Reserve is considered to be insufficient and provides little to cover unforeseen costs. Within the Medium Term Financial Strategy, growth to reserves will be included at a rate of £2m per year.
- 3.28 There is a regular review of earmarked reserves undertaken to determine whether they can be released in part or in full to assist with funding the Council's current financial challenges, recognising that this only provides one-year funding solutions.

Reserves Summary

- 3.29 A summary breakdown of the Council's reserves is presented in the table below, showing the balance of reserves as at 30 November 2025.

Summary of General and Earmarked Reserves	
Reserve	Reserve Value £m
Corporate:	
General Fund	5.149
Capital Reserve	0.398
Insurance Reserve	0.849
Specific Projects:	
Adult Social Care	0.711
Fleet Replacement	0.454
Highways Feasibility Costs	0.102
Local Development Framework	0.544
Community & Environment	0.542
Mersey Valley Golf Club	0.480
Mersey Gateway	33.542
CCLA Property Fund	0.263
Various Other	0.159
Grants:	
Building Schools for the Future	6.529
Public Health	1.147
Supporting Families Performance Payments	0.204
Children's & Education	1.257
Domestic Abuse	0.915
Enterprise & Employment	0.777
Food Waste Collection	0.237
Mersey Gateway Environmental Trust	0.492
Various Other	0.154
Total Earmarked Reserves	54.903

3.30 The above table shows the diminishing level of reserves available to assist with funding any future budget overspends and balancing future budgets. Only the £5.149m of the General Fund could now be used for these purposes, as all remaining reserves are committed for specific purposes.

Capital Spending

3.31 Council approved the 2025/26 Capital Programme on 5 March 2025. Since then the capital programme has been revised to reflect a number of changes in spending profiles and funding as schemes have developed. Appendix 5 brings all the separate elements together and report on the Council's total planned capital programme expenditure. The schemes which have been revised within the programme are as follows:

- i. Sci-tech Daresbury Project Violet
- ii. Astmoor Masterplan

- iii. Sci-tech Daresbury – CPO
- iv. Runcorn Town Centre Management
- v. Widnes Town Centre Framework
- vi. East Runcorn Connectivity
- vii. Mersey Gateway Crossings Board

3.32 Capital spending at 30 November 2025 totalled £28.258m, which represents 53% of the total Capital Programme of £53.064m (which assumes a 20% slippage between years).

3.33 Capital receipts available to fund the programme are expected to be fully utilised by the end of the financial year. If planned use of receipts is to allocation there is risk to £0.375 of these costs falling on the General Fund position. Provision has been included within Corporate and Democracy to cover the event of this happening.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 As at 30 November 2025, net revenue spend is forecast to be £1.281m over the budget to date despite significant levels of growth being included within the budget.
- 4.2 Urgent corrective should be taken as soon as possible across all Council services to identify spend reductions and ensure that agreed savings are fully implemented in a timely manner.
- 4.3 Departments should ensure that all spending continues to be limited to what is absolutely essential throughout the remainder of the year, to ensure that the forecast outturn overspend is minimised as far as possible and future spending is brought in line with budget.

5.0 POLICY AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

- 6.1 **Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**
- 6.2 **Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy**
- 6.3 **Supporting Children, Young People and Families**
- 6.4 **Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need**
- 6.5 **Working Towards a Greener Future**
- 6.6 **Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

There are no direct implications, however, the revenue budget and capital programme support the delivery and achievement of all the Council's priorities above.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 There are a number of financial risks within the budget. The Council has internal controls and processes in place to ensure that spending remains in line with budget as far as possible.
- 7.2 A budget risk register of significant financial risks has been prepared and is included at Appendix 6.

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 1072

- 10.1 There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act

Summary of Revenue Spending to 30 November 2025

APPENDIX 1

Directorate / Department	Annual Budget £'000	Budget To Date £'000	Actual To Date £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	November 2025 Forecast Outturn (o'spend) £'000
Adult Social Care	24,559	16,097	16,706	(609)	(768)
Care Homes`	8,077	5,664	5,748	(84)	(385)
Community Care	28,404	18,203	18,614	(411)	(683)
Complex Care Pool	13,249	3,667	3,128	539	303
Adults Directorate	74,289	43,631	44,196	(565)	(1,533)
Finance	5,662	4,318	3,984	334	432
Legal & Democratic Services	323	150	10	140	102
ICT & Support Services	269	170	125	45	68
Chief Executives Delivery Unit	1,157	577	616	(39)	(108)
Chief Executives Directorate	7,411	5,215	4,735	480	494
Children & Families	55,584	31,144	31,799	(655)	(209)
Education, Inclusion & Provision	12,142	7,978	8,571	(593)	(1,034)
Children's Directorate	67,726	39,122	40,370	(1,248)	(1,243)
Community & Greenspace	23,899	14,934	14,879	55	88
Economy, Enterprise & Property	2,523	1,758	1,726	32	127
Planning & Transportation	9,329	4,325	3,397	928	1,390
Environment & Regeneration Directorate	35,751	21,017	20,002	1,015	1,605
Corporate & Democracy	-4,025	-763	-774	11	(635)
Public Health Directorate	1,900	-1,779	-1,792	13	31
Total Operational Net Spend	183,052	106,443	106,737	(294)	(1,281)

Adult Social Care

APPENDIX 2

	Annual Budget £'000	Budget to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure					
Employees	18,815	12,544	11,645	899	1,052
Agency- Covering Vacancies	0	0	1,180	(1,180)	(1,441)
Premises	498	353	327	26	67
Supplies & Services	698	628	768	(140)	(199)
Aids & Adaptations	37	24	28	(4)	2
Transport	341	227	239	(12)	(22)
Food & Drink Provisions	228	152	94	58	128
Supported Accommodation and Services	1,408	939	737	202	301
Emergency Duty Team	157	78	70	8	(20)
Transfer To Reserves	290	13	13	0	0
Contracts & SLAs	1,043	619	606	13	16
Housing Solutions Grant Funded Schemes					
Homelessness Prevention	548	397	275	122	0
Rough Sleepers Initiative	167	111	106	5	0
Trailblazer	75	50	38	12	0
Total Expenditure	24,305	16,135	16,126	9	(116)
Income					
Fees & Charges	-1,044	-696	-447	(249)	(314)
Sales & Rents Income	-538	-407	-351	(56)	(53)
Reimbursements & Grant Income	-2,203	-1,240	-937	(303)	(301)
Capital Salaries	-699	-640	-640	0	0
Housing Schemes Income	-783	-746	-727	(19)	0
Total Income	-5,267	-3,729	-3,102	(627)	(668)
Net Operational Expenditure	19,038	12,406	13,024	(618)	(784)
Recharges					
Premises Support	789	526	526	0	0
Transport	792	528	519	9	16
Central Support	4,039	2,693	2,693	0	0
Asset Rental Support	13	0	0	0	0
HBC Support Costs Income	-112	-56	-56	0	0
Net Total Recharges	5,521	3,691	3,682	9	16
Net Departmental Expenditure	24,559	16,097	16,706	(609)	(768)

Care Homes

	Annual Budget £'000	Budget to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure					
Madeline Mckenna					
Employees	783	521	464	57	85
Agency - covering vacancies	0	0	69	(69)	(92)
Premises	90	51	49	2	9
Supplies & Services	25	14	16	(2)	1
Food Provision	51	29	36	(7)	(3)
Private Client and Out Of Borough Income	-127	-79	-73	(6)	(11)
Reimbursements & other Grant Income	-34	-21	-21	0	0
Total Madeline Mckenna Expenditure	788	515	540	(25)	(11)
Millbrow					
Employees	2,172	1,455	836	619	959
Agency - covering vacancies	0	0	665	(665)	(1,177)
Premises	117	72	95	(23)	(33)
Supplies & Services	72	39	36	3	14
Food Provision	81	47	53	(6)	1
Private Client and Out Of Borough Income	-13	-4	0	(4)	(21)
Reimbursements & other Grant Income	-635	-375	-421	46	70
Total Millbrow Expenditure	1,794	1,234	1,264	(30)	(187)
St Luke's					
Employees	4,096	2,757	1,609	1,148	1,732
Agency - covering vacancies	62	62	1,101	(1,039)	(1,742)
Premises	156	94	127	(33)	(50)
Supplies & Services	68	39	53	(14)	(15)
Food Provision	128	64	84	(20)	(34)
Private Client and Out Of Borough Income	-153	-82	-21	(61)	(24)
Reimbursements & other Grant Income	-1,497	-905	-895	(10)	(18)
Total St Luke's Expenditure	2,860	2,029	2,058	(29)	(151)
St Patrick's					
Employees	2,212	1,474	884	590	865
Agency - covering vacancies	0	0	617	(617)	(918)
Premises	144	88	89	(1)	2
Supplies & Services	67	41	45	(4)	0
Food Provision	127	83	57	26	12
Private Client and Out Of Borough Income	-99	-61	-5	(56)	(93)
Reimbursements & other Grant Income	-866	-439	-409	(30)	(40)
Total St Patrick's Expenditure	1,585	1,186	1,278	(92)	(172)
Care Homes Divison Management					
Employees	322	215	123	92	136
Care Home Divison Management	322	215	123	92	136
Net Operational Expenditure	7,349	5,179	5,263	(84)	(385)
Recharges					
Premises Support	65	43	43	0	0
Transport Support	0	0	0	0	0
Central Support	663	442	442	0	0
Asset Rental Support	0	0	0	0	0
Recharge Income	0	0	0	0	0
Net Total Recharges	728	485	485	0	0
Net Departmental Expenditure	8,077	5,664	5,748	(84)	(385)

Community Care

	Annual Budget £'000	Budget to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure					
Residential & Nursing	21,977	12,809	12,885	(76)	(169)
Domiciliary Care & Supported living	16,703	10,487	10,792	(305)	(488)
Direct Payments	15,665	10,528	10,608	(80)	(115)
Day Care	712	438	406	32	52
Total Expenditure	55,057	34,262	34,691	(429)	(720)
Income					
Residential & Nursing Income	-13,081	-7,610	-7,620	10	14
Community Care Income	-3,115	-1,747	-1,659	(88)	(140)
Direct Payments Income	-1,034	-540	-636	96	163
Income from other CCGs	-471	-230	-230	0	0
Market sustainability & Improvement Grant	-2,796	-1,864	-1,864	0	0
Adult Social Care Support Grant	-6,102	-4,068	-4,068	0	0
War Pension Disregard Grant	-54	0	0	0	0
Total Income	-26,653	-16,059	-16,077	18	37
Net Operational Expenditure	28,404	18,203	18,614	(411)	(683)

Complex Care Pool

	Annual Budget £'000	Budget to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure					
Intermediate Care Services	6,425	3,736	3,461	275	414
Oakmeadow	2,040	1,315	1,284	31	46
Community Home Care First	1,838	610	198	412	617
Joint Equipment Store	880	367	367	0	0
Contracts & SLA's	3,330	-7	-7	0	0
Inglenook	137	80	62	18	27
HICafs	3,729	1,578	1,383	195	292
Carers Breaks	445	240	240	0	0
Carers centre	365	-15	-15	0	0
Residential Care	7,236	4,524	4,524	0	0
Domiciliary Care & Supported Living	4,336	2,890	2,890	0	0
Pathway 3/Discharge Access	426	286	286	0	0
HBC Contracts	72	65	65	0	0
Healthy at Home	28	-28	-28	0	0
Capacity	30	21	13	8	12
Total Expenditure	31,317	15,662	14,723	939	1,408
Income					
BCF	-15,032	-10,022	-10,022	0	0
CCG Contribution to Pool	-3,034	-1,973	-1,973	0	0
Oakmeadow Income	-2	0	0	0	(1)
Total Income	-18,068	-11,995	-11,995	0	(1)
ICB Contribution Share of Surplus	0	0	0	0	(704)
HBC Transfer to Community Care Budget	0	0	400	(400)	(400)
Net Operational Expenditure	13,249	3,667	3,128	539	303

Finance Department

	Annual Budget £'000	Budget to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure					
Employees	7,461	4,935	4,764	171	257
Insurances	1,048	812	636	176	264
Supplies & Services	1,127	577	648	(71)	(107)
Rent Allowances	31,500	17,330	17,330	0	0
Concessionary Travel	1,902	1,116	1,069	47	71
LCR Levy	1,902	0	0	0	0
Bad Debt Provision	223	0	0	0	(65)
Non HRA Rent Rebates	70	57	16	41	61
Discretionary Social Fund	106	68	1	67	101
Discretionary Housing Payments	279	145	145	0	0
Household Support Fund Expenditure	1,207	1,207	1,207	0	0
Total Expenditure	46,825	26,247	25,816	431	582
Income					
Fees & Charges	-361	-281	-316	35	53
Burdens Grant	-58	-55	-49	(6)	(9)
Dedicated Schools Grant	-150	0	0	0	0
Council Tax Liability Order	-670	-528	-528	0	0
Business Rates Admin Grant	-157	0	0	0	1
Schools SLAs	-319	-309	-308	(1)	(1)
LCR Reimbursement	-1,902	0	0	0	0
HB Overpayment Debt Recovery	-300	-205	-166	(39)	(58)
Rent Allowances	-30,700	-16,500	-16,219	(281)	(421)
Non HRA Rent Rebate	-70	-60	-27	(33)	(50)
Discretionary Housing Payment Grant	-279	-93	-93	0	0
Housing Benefits Admin Grant	-453	-302	-302	0	0
Housing Benefits Award Accuracy	0	-7	-22	15	22
Universal Credits	-5	-3	-9	6	4
Household Support Fund Grant	-1,207	-360	-360	0	0
CCG McMillan Reimbursement	-89	-44	-44	0	0
Reimbursements & Grant Income	-187	-180	-387	207	309
Transfer from Reserves	-27	-13	-13	0	0
Total Income	-36,934	-18,940	-18,843	(97)	(150)
Net Operational Expenditure	9,891	7,307	6,973	334	432
Recharges					
Premises Support	493	308	308	0	0
Transport	0	0	0	0	0
Central Support	2,092	1,246	1,246	0	0
Asset Rental Support	0	0	0	0	0
HBC Support Costs Income	-6,814	-4,543	-4,543	0	0
Net Total Recharges	-4,229	-2,989	-2,989	0	0
Net Departmental Expenditure	5,662	4,318	3,984	334	432

Legal Services

	Annual Budget £'000	Budget to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure					
Employees	2,314	1,525	1,170	355	532
Agency Related Expenditure	79	79	202	(123)	(246)
Supplies & Services	181	151	136	15	32
Civic Catering & Functions	21	14	11	3	5
Legal Expenses	418	105	177	(72)	(144)
Transport Related Expenditure	8	3	3	0	0
Other Expenditure	1	1	2	(1)	(2)
Total Expenditure	3,022	1,878	1,701	177	177
Income					
Fees & Charges Income	-75	-39	-21	(18)	(35)
School SLA's	-100	-88	-77	(11)	(23)
Licence Income	-386	-177	-169	(8)	(17)
Total Income	-561	-304	-267	(37)	(75)
Net Operational Expenditure	2,461	1,574	1,434	140	102
Recharges					
Premises Support	62	42	42	0	0
Transport Recharges	0	0	0	0	0
Central Support Recharges	275	184	184	0	0
Asset Rental Support	0	0	0	0	0
Support Recharge Income	-2,475	-1,650	-1,650	0	0
Net Total Recharges	-2,138	-1,424	-1,424	0	0
Net Departmental Expenditure	323	150	10	140	102

ICT & Support Services Department

	Annual Budget £'000	Budget to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure					
Employees	5,899	3,873	3,736	137	205
Supplies & Services	1,063	807	736	71	107
Capital Finance	496	287	249	38	57
Computer Repairs & Software	1,724	1,966	1,987	(21)	(30)
Communication Costs	138	84	104	(20)	(31)
Premises	139	87	83	4	10
Transport	3	2	1	1	1
Other	4	1	4	(3)	(5)
Total Expenditure	9,466	7,107	6,900	207	314
Income					
Fees & Charges	-849	-255	-283	28	42
Schools SLA Income	-659	-561	-364	(197)	(295)
Transfer from Reserves	0	0	-7	7	7
Total Income	-1,508	-816	-654	(162)	(246)
Net Operational Expenditure	7,958	6,291	6,246	45	68
Recharges					
Premises Support	373	249	249	0	0
Transport	22	15	15	0	0
Central Support	1,391	928	928	0	0
Asset Rental Support	1,494	0	0	0	0
HBC Support Costs Income	-10,969	-7,313	-7,313	0	0
Net Total Recharges	-7,689	-6,121	-6,121	0	0
Net Departmental Expenditure	269	170	125	45	68

Chief Executives Delivery Unit

	Annual Budget £'000	Budget to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure					
Employees	3,569	2,339	2,313	26	40
Employees Training	99	67	60	7	11
Apprenticeship Levy	330	176	215	(39)	(59)
Supplies & Services	412	341	384	(43)	(65)
Agency	3	3	3	0	0
Total Expenditure	4,413	2,926	2,975	-49	-73
Income					
Fees & Charges	-241	-176	-206	30	46
Schools SLA Income	-580	-550	-495	(55)	(81)
Total Income	-821	-726	-701	(25)	(35)
Net Operational Expenditure	3,592	2,200	2,274	(74)	(108)
Recharges					
Premises Support	157	105	105	0	0
Transport Support	0	0	0	0	0
Central Support	1,008	672	672	0	0
Asset Rental Support	53	35	0	35	0
Recharge Income	-3,653	-2,435	-2,435	0	0
Net Total Recharges	-2,435	-1,623	-1,658	35	0
Net Departmental Expenditure	1,157	577	616	(39)	(108)

Children & Families

	Annual Budget £'000	Budget to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure					
Employees	20,973	13,328	13,192	136	96
Other Premises	392	222	214	8	11
Supplies & Services	1,729	1,210	1,631	(421)	(522)
Transport	367	211	161	50	76
Direct Payments	1,220	803	708	95	141
Commissioned services to Vol Orgs	232	119	119	0	0
Residential Care	27,751	15,759	15,933	(174)	513
Out of Borough Adoption	97	49	5	44	92
Out of Borough Fostering	5,605	3,047	3,772	(725)	(1,114)
In House Adoption	557	177	161	16	23
Special Guardianship Order	2,604	1,615	1,535	80	119
In House Foster Carer Placements	2,766	1,706	1,341	365	548
Lavender House Contract Costs	279	163	160	3	4
Home Support & Respite	496	385	316	69	103
Care Leavers	434	257	248	9	15
Family Support	81	44	15	29	41
Contracted services	3	2	2	0	0
Emergency Duty	184	33	33	0	0
Youth Offending Services	461	32	127	(95)	(143)
Total Expenditure	66,231	39,162	39,673	(511)	3
Income					
Fees & Charges	-49	-36	-27	(9)	(14)
Sales Income	-1	-1	-1	0	0
Rents	-82	-50	-50	0	0
Reimbursement & other Grant Income	-512	-566	-423	(143)	(212)
Transfer from reserve	-16	8	-1	9	14
Dedicated Schools Grant	-50	0	0	0	0
Government Grants	-13,838	-9,960	-9,960	0	0
Total Income	-14,548	-10,605	-10,462	(143)	(212)
Net Operational Expenditure	51,683	28,557	29,211	(654)	(209)
Recharges					
Premises Support	736	490	490	0	0
Transport	10	6	7	(1)	0
Central Support Recharges	3,331	2,221	2,221	0	0
Asset Rental Support	0	0	0	0	0
HBC Support Costs Income	-176	-130	-130	0	0
Net Total Recharges	3,901	2,587	2,588	(1)	0
Net Departmental Expenditure	55,584	31,144	31,799	(655)	(209)

Education, Inclusion & Provision

	Annual Budget £'000	Budget to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure					
Employees	8,796	5,550	5,321	229	310
Agency - covering vacancies	0	0	131	(131)	(204)
Agency - in addition to establishment	66	72	85	(13)	6
Premises	15	9	1	8	2
Supplies & Services	3,281	1,799	1,819	(21)	(34)
Independent School Fees	10,155	7,805	7,805	0	0
Schools Contingency	430	168	168	0	0
Transport	43	27	42	(15)	(26)
Schools Transport	2,772	1,293	1,760	(466)	(777)
Early Years Payments including Pupil Premium	15,805	10,217	10,217	0	0
Commissioned Services	2,193	1,251	1,255	(4)	(7)
Inter Authority Special Needs	1,400	1,282	1,282	0	0
Grants to Voluntary Organisations	115	-21	19	(40)	(67)
Capital Finance	4,599	2,844	2,847	(2)	(4)
Total Expenditure	49,670	32,295	32,752	(456)	(800)
Income					
Fees & Charges Income	-338	-325	-349	24	41
Government Grant Income	-6,896	-4,193	-4,189	(4)	0
Dedicated Schools Grant	-30,134	-20,088	-20,088	0	0
Inter Authority Income	-446	-366	-243	(124)	(206)
Reimbursements & Other Grant Income	-1,767	-1,064	-1,061	(3)	(5)
Schools SLA Income	-538	-369	-334	(35)	(59)
Transfer From Reserves	-551	-134	-142	8	0
Total Income	-40,670	-26,540	-26,407	(133)	(229)
Net Operational Expenditure	9,000	5,756	6,345	(589)	(1,029)
Recharges					
Premises Support	405	270	270	0	0
Transport Support	773	654	658	(3)	(5)
Central Support	1,947	1,298	1,298	0	0
Asset Rental Support	17	0	0	0	0
Recharge Income	0	0	0	0	0
Net Total Recharges	3,142	2,222	2,226	(3)	(5)
Net Departmental Expenditure	12,142	7,978	8,571	(593)	(1,034)

Community & Greenspaces

	Annual Budget £'000	Budget to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure					
Employees	15,639	10,403	9,996	407	611
Agency - Covering vacancies	20	16	16	0	0
Agency - In addition to establishment	16	16	201	(185)	(272)
Premises	3,304	1,973	1,995	(22)	(32)
Supplies & Services	3,659	2,416	2,597	(181)	(272)
Transport	117	72	91	(19)	(28)
Extended Producer Responsibility	500	30	30	0	0
Other Agency Costs	454	287	275	12	17
Other Expenditure	187	102	99	3	4
Waste Disposal Contracts	7,121	2,867	2,906	(39)	(57)
Transfers to Reserves	1,091	0	0	0	0
Total Expenditure	32,108	18,182	18,206	(24)	(29)
Income					
Sales Income	-1,359	-931	-916	(15)	(23)
Fees & Charges Income	-6,300	-4,678	-4,806	128	192
Rental Income	-1,118	-632	-573	(59)	(88)
Government Grant Income	-5,210	-1,458	-1,458	0	0
Reimbursement & Other Grant Income	-871	-493	-493	0	0
SLA Income	-23	0	0	0	0
Internal Fees Income	-216	-98	-199	101	152
Capital Salaries	-236	-76	-67	(9)	(14)
Transfers From Reserves	-619	-4	-4	0	0
Total Income	-15,952	-8,370	-8,516	146	219
Net Operational Expenditure	16,156	9,812	9,690	122	190
Recharges					
Premises Support	1,657	1,105	1,105	0	0
Transport Support	2,433	1,714	1,781	(67)	(102)
Central Support	4,297	2,865	2,865	0	0
Asset Rental Support	199	0	0	0	0
Recharge Income	-843	-562	-562	0	0
Net Total Recharges	7,743	5,122	5,189	(67)	(102)
Net Departmental Expenditure	23,899	14,934	14,879	55	88

Economy, Enterprise & Property

	Annual Budget £'000	Budget to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure					
Employees	3,915	3,314	3,134	180	250
Agency - covering vacancies	0	0	206	(206)	(270)
Repairs & Maintenance	1,700	1,262	1,262	0	0
Premises	174	136	137	(1)	(2)
Energy & Water Costs	1,075	560	506	54	80
NNDR	647	647	676	(29)	(29)
Rents	157	118	117	1	1
Economic Regeneration Activities	3	3	8	(5)	0
Security	508	257	256	1	3
Supplies & Services	578	317	317	0	(1)
Supplies & Services - Grant	1,040	485	485	0	0
Grants to Voluntary Organisations	72	35	35	0	0
Capital Finance	22	0	0	0	0
Total Expenditure	9,891	7,134	7,139	(5)	32
Income					
Fees & Charges Income	-398	-272	-308	36	89
Rent - Commercial Properties	-929	-572	-571	(1)	4
Rent - Investment Properties	-38	-26	-25	(1)	(1)
Government Grant	-1,118	-1,119	-1,119	0	0
Reimbursements & Other Grant Income	-203	-172	-172	0	0
Schools SLA Income	-55	-55	-58	3	3
Recharges to Capital	-367	-158	-158	0	0
Transfer from Reserves	-564	-535	-535	0	0
Total Income	-3,672	-2,909	-2,946	37	95
Net Operational Expenditure	6,219	4,225	4,193	32	127
Recharges					
Premises Support	2,738	1,826	1,826	0	0
Transport	26	17	17	0	0
Central Support	2,878	1,918	1,918	0	0
Asset Rental Support	4	0	0	0	0
HBC Support Costs Income	-9,342	-6,228	-6,228	0	0
Net Total Recharges	-3,696	-2,467	-2,467	0	0
Net Departmental Expenditure	2,523	1,758	1,726	32	127

Planning & Transportation Department

	Annual Budget £'000	Budget to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure					
Employees	5,957	3,961	3,570	391	587
Efficiency Savings	-100	-66	0	(66)	(100)
Premises	188	122	100	22	34
Hired & Contracted Services	415	98	103	(5)	(8)
Supplies & Services	142	203	350	(147)	(220)
Street Lighting	1,643	479	527	(48)	(72)
Highways Maintenance - Routine & Reactive	1,803	781	1,142	(361)	(542)
Highways Maintenance - Programmed Works	812	574	153	421	632
Fleet Transport	1,467	921	927	(6)	(10)
Bus Support - Halton Hopper Tickets	14	9	4	5	8
Bus Support	506	587	587	0	0
Agency Related Expenditure	8	6	141	(135)	(202)
Grants to Voluntary Organisations	31	31	31	0	0
NRA Levy	75	74	74	0	1
LCR Levy	1,553	1,164	1,164	0	0
Contribution to Reserves	359	0	0	0	0
Total Expenditure	14,873	8,944	8,873	71	108
Income					
Sales & Rents Income	-97	-72	-64	(8)	(12)
Planning Fees	-798	-534	-750	216	324
Building Control Fees	-251	-167	-131	(36)	(55)
Other Fees & Charges	-971	-634	-1,166	532	798
Reimbursements & Grant Income	-174	-160	-160	0	0
Government Grant Income	-57	-57	-57	0	0
Halton Hopper Income	-15	-10	-7	(3)	(5)
Recharge to Capital	-119	0	0	0	0
LCR Levy Reimbursement	-1,553	-1,164	-1,164	0	0
Contribution from Reserves	-132	-157	-157	0	0
Total Income	-4,167	-2,955	-3,656	701	1,050
Net Operational Expenditure	10,706	5,989	5,217	772	1,158
Recharges					
Premises Recharges	739	493	493	0	0
Transport Recharges	808	517	517	0	(2)
Central Recharges	2,505	1,672	1,672	0	0
Asset Charges	918	0	0	0	0
HBC Support Costs Income	-6,347	-4,346	-4,502	156	234
Net Total Recharges	-1,377	-1,664	-1,820	156	232
Net Departmental Expenditure	9,329	4,325	3,397	928	1,390

Corporate & Democracy

	Annual Budget £'000	Budget to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure					
Employees	432	275	316	(41)	(40)
Contracted Services	12	6	0	6	0
Supplies & Services	102	89	-79	168	42
Premises Expenditure	24	18	17	1	0
Transport Costs	1	0	40	(40)	0
Members Allowances	994	663	703	(40)	0
Contingency	674	447	0	447	670
Contribution to Reserves	300	300	263	37	(647)
Debt Management Expenses	20	13	63	(50)	(13)
Precepts & Levies	244	244	244	0	0
Interest Payable - Treasury Management	2,303	1,538	1,298	240	360
Interest Payable - Other	215	143	143	0	0
Capital Financing (Minimum Revenue Provision)	3,004	3,004	2,966	38	38
Cost of Exceptional Financial Support					
Interest Payable	1,225	817	731	86	129
Capital Financing (Minimum Revenue Provision)	500	500	500	0	0
Cost of Dedicated School Grant Deficit					
Interest Payable	725	483	594	(111)	(166)
Efficiency Savings:					
Purchase of Additional Leave	-100	-67	-114	47	165
Voluntary Severance Scheme	-200	-133	0	(133)	(200)
Apprenticeship First Model	-200	-133	-17	(116)	(174)
Agency Staff Reduction	-1,700	-1,133	0	(1,133)	(1,700)
Accelerate the Lease or Sale of Surplus Land	-100	-67	0	(67)	(100)
Review of Debt Management	-100	-67	0	(67)	(100)
Review Existing Contracts	-200	-134	0	(134)	(200)
Total Expenditure	8,175	6,806	7,668	(862)	(1,936)
Income					
Interest Receivable - Treasury Management	-3,045	-2,030	-2,914	884	1,270
Interest Receivable - Other	-19	-13	-13	0	57
Other Fees & Charges	-146	-91	-80	(11)	(26)
Grants & Reimbursements	-334	-223	-223	0	0
Government Grant Income	-6,272	-4,181	-4,181	0	0
Total Income	-9,816	-6,538	-7,411	873	1,301
Net Operational Expenditure	-1,641	268	257	11	(635)
Recharges					
Premises Support	22	15	15	0	0
Transport	0	0	0	0	0
Central Support	898	632	632	0	0
Asset Rental Support	0	0	0	0	0
HBC Support Costs Income	-3,304	-1,678	-1,678	0	0
Net Total Recharges	-2,384	-1,031	-1,031	0	0
Net Departmental Expenditure	-4,025	-763	-774	11	(635)

Public Health

	Annual Budget £'000	Budget to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure					
Employees	5,631	3,410	3,318	92	109
Other Premises	6	4	0	4	6
Supplies & Services	439	168	228	(60)	(90)
Contracts	6,918	3,910	4,075	(165)	0
SLA's	372	115	77	38	0
Transport	4	2	2	0	1
Transfer to Reserves	660	0	0	0	(150)
Grants to Voluntary Organisations	20	2	2	0	0
Other Agency	24	24	24	0	0
Total Expenditure	14,074	7,635	7,726	(91)	(124)
Income					
Fees & Charges	-122	-57	-86	29	43
Reimbursements & Grant Income	-647	-737	-795	58	88
Transfer from Reserves	-428	-348	-357	9	13
Government Grant Income	-12,478	-9,285	-9,294	9	13
Total Income	-13,675	-10,427	-10,532	105	157
Net Operational Expenditure	399	-2,792	-2,806	14	33
Recharges					
Premises Support	209	139	139	0	0
Transport Support	24	16	17	(1)	(2)
Central Support	1,937	1,304	1,304	0	0
Asset Rental Support	0	0	0	0	0
Recharge Income	-669	-446	-446	0	0
Net Total Recharges	1,501	1,013	1,014	(1)	(2)
Net Departmental Expenditure	1,900	-1,779	-1,792	13	31

High Needs 2025/26 Forecast Spend Position

Appendix 3

	Annual Budget £'000	Forecast Spend £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure			
High Needs Place Funding - Mainstream Units	1,432	2,047	(615)
High Needs Place Funding - Special Schools	4,946	7,365	(2,419)
High Needs Place Funding - PRU	996	1,089	(93)
Top-Up Funding - Maintained Mainstream Schools	2,728	4,512	(1,784)
Top-Up Funding - Maintained Special Schools	2,151	2,845	(694)
Top-Up Funding - Maintained PRU	1,743	1,739	4
Top-Up Funding - Maintained Academies, Free Schools and Colleges	2,029	3,383	(1,354)
Top-Up Funding - Academies Special	990	3,336	(2,346)
Top-Up Funding - Non-Maintained and Independent Providers	7,272	11,087	(3,815)
Top-Up Funding - Post 16 FE	2,796	2,167	629
SEN Support Services	2,280	2,234	46
Special Free School	331	579	(248)
Exclusions	0	59	(59)
Support for Inclusion	45	45	0
Therapies and Other Health Related Services	20	20	0
Total Expenditure	29,759	42,507	(12,748)

Progress Against Agreed Savings

APPENDIX 4

Adult Social Care

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		
Housing Solutions	474	Remodel the current service based on good practice evidence from other areas.	125	0	U	Currently Under Review
Voluntary Sector Support	N/A	Review the support provided by Adult Social Care and all other Council Departments, to voluntary sector organisations. This would include assisting them to secure alternative funding in order to reduce their dependence upon Council funding. A target saving phased over two years has been estimated.	100	0	✓	Achieved
Community Wardens/Telecare Service		Community Wardens/Telecare Service – a review will be undertaken of the various options available for the future delivery of these services, with support from the Transformation Delivery Unit.	0	280	✗	Unlikely to be achieved – currently forecast overspend position. However, these services are currently being reviewed as part of the transformation programme.

Care Management Community Care Budget		Community Care – continuation of the work being undertaken to review care provided through the Community Care budget, in order to reduce the current overspend and ongoing costs.	0	1,000		Unlikely to be achieved to be achieved on a longer term basis. Interim measures in place to support the current year position includes use of surplus capital grants. While the current overspend is being reduced significantly, it is unlikely the required budget reduction will be achieved by year-end.
Various		Review of Service Delivery Options – reviews will be undertaken of the various service delivery options available for a number of areas including; Day Services, Halton Supported Housing Network, In-House Care Homes, Reablement Service and Oak Meadow.	0	375		Unlikely to be achieved by financial year-end.
Total ASC Directorate			225	1,655		

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		
Internal Audit	300	Restructure in light of potential retirements over the next two years within the Internal Audit Team.	50	0	X	It appears unlikely that the proposed £50k budget saving will be fully realised this year, if at all
Council Tax	84	Increase the charges applied when a court summons is issued by 30% (£23), to achieve full cost recovery over the three year period.	40	0	X	Look to increase costs in 2026/27 but this is pending a Government consultation on council tax of which summons charges are being reviewed.
Debt Management		Debt Management – undertake a review of debt management policies and procedures, in order to implement a more robust approach to debt management and debt recovery, considering options such as seeking payment in advance wherever possible, to improve cashflow and reduce the risk of non-recovery.	0	100	U	Currently part of workstream being undertaken by the Transformation Programme.
Total Finance Department			90	100		

Legal and Democratic Services

Service Area		Description of Saving Proposal	Savings Value	Current	Comments
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	Net Budget £'000		25/26 Agreed Council 01 February 2023 £'000	25/26 Agreed Council 05 March 2025 £'000	Progress	
Members		Deputy Mayor – cease provision of the Deputy Mayor's allowance, whilst retaining a nominated Deputy Mayor.	0	6	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Achieved.
Total Legal and Democratic Services			0	6		

Children and Families Department

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	x	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	u	Whilst residential placement cost is currently forecast to be within budget, uncertainty continues on the saving being achieved given the risk of children entering into care during the remainder of the financial year. 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,	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	

		thereby reducing the timescales involved and cost of court proceedings, in order to reduce the current overspend and ongoing costs.				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 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 and Provision Department

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	X	The consultation with stakeholders and partners has taken place. The results have been analysed and recommendations put to Executive Board for possible policy changes which will not be implemented until Autumn 2026
Total EIP Department			0	300		

Community and Greenspace Department

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		
Stadium & Catering Services – School Meals	12	Cease to deliver the school meals service, which has made significant losses of over £200,000 for a number of years and is forecast to make a similar loss by year-end. Work would be undertaken with schools over the next two years to support them to secure an alternative means of delivery, whether in-house or via an external provider.	12	0	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	School meals service has ceased and is reflected in the 25/26 budget.
Green Waste		Green Waste – increase green waste charges from £43 to £50 per annum, to bring Halton onto a comparable basis with charges levied by neighbouring councils.	0	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Green waste charges have been increased to £50.
Area Forums		Area Forums – cease the funding for Area Forums.	0	170	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Area forum budgets have been removed in 25-26

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		
Total Community & Greenspace Dept			12	270		

Economy, Enterprise and Property Department

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		
Asset Management		Accelerate the lease or sale of surplus land, non-operational buildings, surplus space within building, etc. to either generate lease rentals or capital receipts to help fund capital schemes and thereby reduce future capital financing costs.	0	100	U	It is not expected this saving will materialise in the current year.
Total EEP Dept			0	100		

Policy, Planning and Transportation Department

Service Area	Net Budget £'000	Description of Saving Proposal	Savings Value		Current Progress	Comments
			24/25 £'000	25/26 £'000		
Highways		LED Advertising Screens – install LED advertising screens at appropriate locations within the Borough in order to generate advertising revenue. The estimated annual income is the Council's share of advertising revenue net of capital financing costs for the installations.	0	100	X	It is not anticipated that this income will be achieved this financial year as the LED screens are no closer to being installed.
Total PPT Dept			0	100		

Public Health Directorate Department

Service Area	Net Budget £'000	Description of Saving Proposal	Savings Value		Current Progress	Comments
			24/25 £'000	25/26 £'000		
Environmental Health		Pest Control – increase charges for pest control on the basis of benchmarking data, to bring Halton onto a comparable basis with charges levied by neighbouring councils.	0	45	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Charges Increased
Total Public Health Directorate			0	45		

Corporate and Democracy

Service Area	Net Budget £'000	Description of Saving Proposal	Savings Value		Current Progress	Comments
			24/25 £'000	25/26 £'000		
Chief Executives Delivery Unit		Purchase of Additional Leave – development of a voluntary scheme to enable staff to purchase additional annual leave.	0	100	✓	Scheme has been agreed and implemented. Prudent forecast of saving against the scheme is estimated to be in the region of £0.265m
Chief Executives Delivery Unit		Voluntary Severance Scheme – development of a policy whereby staff may be offered voluntary severance in appropriate circumstances, but without creating a significant pension strain liability.	0	200	✗	Scheme to be designed and approved. Uncertainty to timing and sign-up to the scheme. Unlikely to be in place for this financial year.
Chief Executives Delivery Unit		Apprenticeships - implement an “Apprentice First” policy, with all appropriate vacant posts assessed initially to determine whether they might be suitable as an apprenticeship. This will build longer term resilience into the organisation’s workforce and provide short term cost savings by drawing down funding from the apprenticeship levy. The scheme will be co-ordinated by the newly appointed Apprenticeship Officer, funded and supported	0	200	U	Scheme being developed, uncertainty to take up of the scheme. It is currently forecasts savings of £0.026m will be achieved by financial year-end.

	by the Transformation Delivery Unit.					
Council Wide	Agency Staff Reduction – continuation of the work being co-ordinated by the Transformation Delivery Unit to reduce the reliance upon agency workers across the Council, in particular within Adults and Children's Social Care. Target net savings of £1.7m for 2025/26, £1.3m for 2026/27 and £1.1m for 2027/28.	0	1,700	x	There is evidence of reduced agency usage within the Children's directorate but targets have been built into directorate budget which duplicate what is included here. Uncertainty with regard to reductions across Adult Social Care. Highly unlikely the £1.7m saving will be achieved in the current financial year.	
Council Wide	Debt Management – undertake a review of debt management policies and procedures, in order to implement a more robust approach to debt management and debt recovery, considering options such as seeking payment in advance wherever possible, to improve cashflow and reduce the risk of non-recovery.	0	100	u	Review of debt management particularly with Adult Social Care has commenced.	
Council Wide	Review all existing contracts across the Council to re-consider their requirements and performance on the basis of outputs achieved.	0	200	u	Currently part of workstream being undertaken by the Transformation Programme.	

Total Corporate & Democracy	0	2,400			

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Objective</u>
	Indicates that the <u>objective</u> is on course to be achieved within the appropriate timeframe.
	Indicates that it is <u>uncertain or too early to say at this stage</u> whether the milestone/objective will be achieved within the appropriate timeframe.
	Indicates that it is <u>highly likely or certain</u> that the objective will not be achieved within the appropriate timeframe.

Scheme Detail	2025/26	2025/26	Cumulative	Cumulative	Cumulative	Allocation	2026/27
	Original	Revised	Spend to 30	Forecast	Forecast		Forecast
	Allocation	Allocation	Nov 2025	Spend to 31	Spend to 31	Allocation	Allocation
£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Childrens Directorate							
Capital Repairs	882.1	882.1	700	700	754.0	128.1	0.0
Asbestos Management	10.0	10.0	0.5	6	10.0	0.0	0.0
Schools Access Initiative	37.7	37.7	34	34	41.0	-3.3	0.0
Basic Need Projects	600.8	600.8	0	0	100.0	500.8	0.0
Small Capital Works	173.0	173.0	98	105	170.0	3.0	0.0
SEND capital allocation	1,871.2	1,871.2	202	675	1,275.0	596.2	45.0
SEND capital unallocated	1,775.5	1,775.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	1,775.5	0.0
SCA unallocated	129.3	129.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	129.3	0.0
Family Hubs & Start for Life	63.0	63.0	11.0	11.0	63	0.0	65.0
Childcare Expansion	314.8	314.8	18	18	314.8	0.0	0.0
AMP Data	25.0	25.0	23	24	25.0	0.0	0.0
Childrens Directorate Total	5,882.4	5,882.4	1,086.6	1,573.1	2,752.8	3,129.6	110.0

2025/26 Capital Programme as at 30 November 2025 continued

Scheme Detail	2025/26	2025/26	Cumulative	Cumulative	Cumulative	Allocation	2026/27
	Original	Revised	Spend to 30	Forecast	Forecast		Forecast
	Allocation	Allocation	Nov 2025	Spend to 31	Spend to 31	remaining	Allocation
Adults Directorate							
Grants - Disabled Facilities	2,200.0	2,000.0	999.0	1,400.0	2,000.0	0.0	700.0
Stair Lifts	400.0	650.0	355.0	450.0	650.0	0.0	700.0
Joint Funding RSL Adaptations	300.0	250.0	187.0	220.0	250.0	0.0	300.0
Madeline McKenna Residential Home	300.0	200.0	43.0	100.0	200.0	0.0	0.0
Millbrow Care Home	200.0	200.0	54.0	100.0	200.0	0.0	0.0
St Lukes	50.0	200.0	115.0	150.0	200.0	0.0	0.0
St Patricks	200.0	200.0	63.0	100.0	200.0	0.0	0.0
Care Home Refurbishment	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Telehealthcare Digital Switchover	135.0	135.0	0.0	0.0	135.0	0.0	0.0
Oakmeadow and Peelhouse Network Improvements	40.0	40.0	0.0	0.0	40.0	0.0	0.0
Crow Wood Lane Specialist Housing	250.0	250.0	250.0	250.0	250.0	0.0	0.0
Adults Directorate Total	4,075.0	4,125.0	2,066.0	2,770.0	4,125.0	0.0	1,700.0
Public Health							
New database for Public Protection Regulatory Services	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	200.0
Public Health Directorate Total	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	200.0

2025/26 Capital Programme as at 30 November 2025 continued

Scheme Detail	2025/26 Original Allocation	2025/26 Revised Allocation	Cumulative Spend to 30 Nov 2025	Cumulative Forecast Spend to 31 Jan 2026	Cumulative Forecast Spend to 31 March 2026	Allocation remaining	2026/27 Forecast Allocation
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000		£000
Environment & Regeneration Directorate							
Stadium Minor Works	22.1	22.1	24.6	24.6	24.6	-2.5	30.0
Halton Leisure Centre	99.7	99.7	92.5	94.0	95.0	4.7	0.0
Children's Playground Equipment	67.8	67.8	52.5	60.5	65.0	2.8	65.0
Landfill Tax Credit Schemes	340.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upton Improvements	13.0	13.0	0.0	0.0	13.0	0.0	0.0
Crow Wood Park Play Area	12.0	12.0	0.0	0.0	12.0	0.0	0.0
Open Spaces Schemes	600.0	770.0	650.9	700.0	770.0	0.0	600.0
Runcorn Town Park	450.6	450.6	10.2	60.0	125.0	325.6	280.0
Spike Island / Wigg Island	1,841.6	250.0	173.4	180.0	250.0	0.0	1,591.6
Pickering's Pasture Cafe	469.2	450.0	301.2	360.0	450.0	0.0	19.2
Cemetery Infrastructure work	469.1	469.1	10.5	207.0	410.0	59.1	683.0
Stadium Public Address System	810.0	346.0	34.9	286.0	346.0	0.0	379.0
Litter Bins	20.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	0.0	20.0
Replacement Cremator	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0
Stadium Steelwork Repairs	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	600.0
Brindley Lighting	0.0	200.0	0.0	100.0	200.0	0.0	0.0
Homeless Accommodation Refurbishment	0.0	52.0	49.3	51.0	52.0	0.0	948.0
CCTV Infrastructure Works	0.0	105.0	1.2	50.0	105.0	0.0	395.0
Equality Act Improvement Works	303.5	303.5	17.7	150.0	303.5	0.0	300.0
Foundary Lane Residential Area	3,520.9	3,520.9	1,229.3	1,850.0	3,520.9	0.0	0.0
Property Improvements	231.1	231.1	121.7	153.6	231.1	0.0	200.0
Town Deal	21,823.1	13,210.2	6,294.6	9,550.0	13,210.2	0.0	8,612.9
UK Shared Prosperity Fund	101.2	101.2	0.0	55.0	101.2	0.0	0.0
Runcorn Waterfront Residential Development	82.0	82.0	4.2	35.0	82.0	0.0	0.0

2025/26 Capital Programme as at 30 November 2025 continued

Scheme Detail	2025/26	2025/26	Cumulative	Cumulative	Cumulative	Allocation	2026/27
	Original	Revised	Spend to 30	Forecast	Forecast		Forecast
	£000	£000	Nov 2025	Spend to 31	March 2026	£000	£000
Changing Places	17.0	17.0	0.0	0.0	17.0	0.0	0.0
Kingsway Centre Demolition	708.0	708.0	438.3	488.0	538.0	170.0	0.0
Port of Weston	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Sci-tech Daresbury Project Violet	2,200.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2,200.0
Astmoor Masterplan	81.6	902.6	902.6	902.6	902.6	0.0	0.0
Sci-tech Daresbury - CPO	3,000.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3,000.0
Warm Homes Plan	0.0	587.6	0.0	0.0	587.6	0.0	587.6
Runcorn Town Centre Management	0.0	822.0	524.6	650.0	822.0	0.0	0.0
Widnes Town Centre Framework	0.0	200.0	53.0	100.0	200.0	0.0	0.0
Bridge and Highway Maintenance	839.2	839.2	181.2	510.2	839.2	0.0	0.0
Runcorn Busway	90.0	90.0	35.9	63.0	90.0	0.0	0.0
ATF3 Murdishaw to Whitehouse	757.0	757.0	538.3	647.7	757.0	0.0	0.0
ATF4 - Widnes Town Centre Accessibility	114.5	114.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	114.5	0.0
A56 Reconstruction	943.7	943.7	95.0	519.4	943.7	0.0	0.0
LCWIP phase 2 Daresbury	3,862	100	30.9	57.7	84.5	15.5	0.0
Pot Hole Funding	968	968	243.8	605.9	968.0	0.4	0.0
CRSTS	4,405	4,405	2,709.9	3,557.5	4,405.0	0.0	0.0
Street Lighting - Structural Maintenance	1,025.1	1,025.1	0.0	100.0	200.0	825.1	1,025.1
Street Lighting - Upgrades	728.4	728.4	0.0	50.0	50.0	678.4	528.4
East Runcorn Connectivity	5,851.7	14,442.2	6,283.7	10,363.0	14,442.2	0.0	0.0
Risk Management	712.9	120.0	23.0	23.0	23.0	97.0	120.0
Widnes Loops	0.0	0.0	65.1	65.1	65.1	-65.1	0.0
Fleet Replacements	4,482.0	2,500.0	1,070.1	1,785.0	2,500.0	0.0	4,482.0
Early Land Acquisition Mersey Gateway	210.0	80.0	49.4	73.0	80.0	0.0	80.0
Mersey Gateway Crossings Board	60.0	-226.7	-226.7	-226.7	-226.7	0.0	60.0
Environment & Regeneration Directorate Total	62,333.3	50,900.2	22,086.8	34,300.9	48,674.7	2,225.5	26,826.7

2025/26 Capital Programme as at 30 November 2025 continued

Scheme Detail	2025/26 Original Allocation £000	2025/26 Revised Allocation £000	Cumulative 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
Chief Executives Directorate							
IT Rolling Programme	805.6	1,305.6	1,022.0	1,245.1	1,245.1	60.5	1,200.0
Halton Smart Microgrid	10,870.0	1,000.0	0.0	0.0	1,000.0	0.0	9,870.0
Transformation Programme	1,538.0	2,465.7	1,557.1	1,928.9	2,195.6	270.1	
Accelerated Growth	0.0	650.7	440.0	546.9	643.9	6.8	
Chief Executives Directorate Total	13,213.6	5,422.0	3,019.1	3,720.9	5,084.6	337.4	11,070.0
Grand Total	85,504.4	66,329.6	28,258.5	42,364.9	60,637.1	5,692.5	39,906.7

Risk No	Risk Identified	Impact	Likelihood	Risk Score	Risk Control Measures	Assessment of Residual Risk with Control Measures Implemented			Responsible Person	Timescale for Review	Progress Comments	Date Updated
						Impact	Likelihood	Risk Score				
1	Pay costs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay award • Staff Turnover Saving Target • Agency, casuals and overtime • National Living Wage • Pension Costs 	4	4	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget based upon individual staff members/vacancies • Budget monitoring • Contingency • Balances • Medium Term Forecast • Engage with Cheshire Pension Scheme and pension actuary • Market supplement paid in multiple service areas • Employer of Choice Initiative • Connect to Halton – Review of Scheme 	3	3	9	ED/SB/ Directors	Monthly	<p>2025/26 budget includes pay growth at forecast 2% pay award. Pay offer agreed at 3.2%, backdated pay actioned in August 2025. Actual cost of the pay award higher at £1.214m than £1m figure previously estimated.</p> <p>Agency costs and usage remain high although clear evidence of reduction in numbers.</p> <p>Market Supplements being paid across increasing number of services.</p>	30/11/25

										Connect to Halton scheme went live September 2024, agency and casual appointments to be covered by the scheme.		
2	Redundancy and Early Retirements	3	3	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits Tracking Process • Future savings to take into account cost of redundancy and early retirements. • Seek Government approval to use capital receipts to fund transformation costs. • Develop policy for voluntary severance scheme 	2	3	6	ED/SB	Quarterly	<p>Tracker created to monitor redundancy costs in current year.</p> <p>Look to capitalise redundancy costs where possible where evidence exists it creates a longer term saving.</p> <p>£0.200m saving included in 25/26 budget for savings from voluntary severance scheme. Scheme unlikely to go live in current financial year.</p>	30/11/25

3	Savings not achieved	4	3	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget monitoring • Contingency • Rigorous process in approving savings. • Review of savings at departmental and directorate level • Monthly budget monitoring • Medium Term Financial Forecast • RAG monitoring of savings included in bi-monthly monitoring reports. • Transformation saving targets reported monthly through Transformation Programme Board. 	4	3	12	RR/ED/SB/Directors	Monthly	<p>Savings for 2025/26 have been written into Directorate budgets.</p> <p>Budget savings monitored closely and if necessary offsetting savings sought.</p> <p>Transformation Programme Board meet on monthly basis to discuss progress against programme.</p>	30/11/25
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4	Price inflation	3	3	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prudent budget provision • Latest forecast information used eg. utilities • Budget monitoring • Contingency • Balances • CPI/RPI monitoring • MTFS 	3	3	9	ED/SB	Monthly	<p>CPI for November 2025 is 3.2% and RPI is 3.8%. Both running higher than inflation included in 2025.26 budget.</p> <p>Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecast inflation is to remain above 3% for the remainder of 2025 and drop to 2.5% in 2026 and then hit the Government target of 2% in 2027.</p>	30/11/25
5	Review of LG Finance	4	4	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPs • SIGOMA / LG Futures • Liverpool City Region & Merseyside Treasurers Group • Medium Term Financial Strategy • Member of business rate retention pilot region 	4	4	9	ED/SB/NS/M W/MG	Weekly/ Monthly	<p>Business rate retention 100% scheme to continue over three year period 2026/27 to 2028/29.</p> <p>Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement issued 17 December 2025. Funding behind modelled levels from Fair Funding</p>	30/11/25

					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue with DCLG • Responding to reviews and consultations 					consultation (Summer 2025) and LG Finance policy Statement (Nov 25). Government have redirected funding towards greater levels of funding for temporary accommodation needs.		
6	Treasury Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Borrowing • Investment 	2	3	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treasury Management Strategy • Link Asset Services advice • Treasury Management planning and monitoring 	1	3	3	ED/SB/MG	Daily / Quarterly	<p>BoE base rate reduced to 3.75%.</p> <p>Impact of Exceptional Financial Support request to be assessed with regards to timing</p>	30/11/25

					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance at Networking and Benchmarking Groups Officer and Member Training 					of future borrowing.		
7	Demand led budgets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children in Care Out of borough fostering Community Care High Needs 	4	4	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget monitoring Contingency Balances Review service demand Directorate recovery groups Monthly budget monitoring Children Improvement Plan Investment Funding 	4	4	16	ED/SB/NS/MW	Monthly	<p>Numbers of children in care and with protection plans reviewed on a weekly basis.</p> <p>Community care costs and numbers on increase, reviewed on a regular basis.</p> <p>Investment in Children Services following OFSTED inspection to be monitored with regard to control and reduction of future costs.</p>	30/11/25
8	Mersey Gateway Costs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Costs 	4	2	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular monitoring with Crossing Board 	2	1	2	ED/SB/MG	Quarterly	Arrangements in place to monitor spend and	30/11/25

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toll Income • Funding • Accounting treatment 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital reserve • Government Grant • Liquidity Fund 					availability of liquidity fund.		
9	Council Tax Collection	3	3	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council tax monitoring on monthly basis • Review of Collection Rate • Collection Fund Balance • Provision for bad debts • Review recovery procedures • Benchmarking 	3	2	6	ED/PG/SB/P D/BH/MG	Monthly	<p>Council tax collection rate through to the end of November 2025 is 71.34% which is 0.09% lower than the collection rate at the same point last year.</p> <p>Debt relating to previous years continues to be collected, and the Council utilises powers through charging orders and attachment to earnings/benefits to secure debts. £1.992m has so far been collected this year in relation to previous years' debt.</p>	30/11/25

10	Business Rates Retention Scheme	3	3	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and monitoring of latest business rates income to baseline and estimate for year. Prudent allowance for losses in collection Prudent provision set aside for losses from valuation appeals Regular monitoring of annual yield and baseline / budget position Benchmarking Groups Review recovery procedures 	3	1	3	ED/SB/LB/MG	Monthly	<p>Business rate collection through to the end of November 2025 is 75.01% which is 1.02% lower than the collection rate at the same point last year.</p> <p>£0.945m has so far been collected this year in relation to previous years' debt.</p>	30/11/25
11	Income recovery	3	3	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate charging policy Budget monitoring Contingency Balances Income benchmarking 	3	1	3	ED/MM/SB	Monthly	<p>Income shortfalls identified and cause of increased concern in certain areas are being closely monitored.</p> <p>Additional posts created within Adult Social Care Directorate, responsible for improving the</p>	30/11/25

										overall collection of social care debt.	
12	Capital Programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costs • Funding • Key Major Projects • Clawback of Grant • Availability and timing of capital receipts • Cashflow • Contractors 	4	3	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Management • Regular monitoring • Detailed financial analysis of new schemes to ensure they are affordable • Targets monitored to minimise clawback of grant. • Contractor due diligence • Dialogue with Government departments. 	3	2	6	Project Managers/ED /SB/LH	Quarterly	Capital receipts have been over committed therefore new capital schemes need to bring own funding.
13	Academy Schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of transfer upon Council budget • Loss of income to Council Services 	2	4	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early identification of school decisions • DfE Regulations • Prudent consideration of financial transactions to facilitate transfer • Services continue to be offered to academies • Transfer Protocol 	1	3	3	ED/SB/NS	Monthly	Consideration given in MTFS for loss of funding.

14	Reserves <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diminishing reserves, used to balance budget, fund overspend positions. 	3	4	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitored on a bi-monthly basis, reported to Management Team and Exec Board Benchmarking Financial Forecast Programme to replenish reserves. 	3	3	9	ED/SB	Quarterly	<p>Monitored and reported on a regular basis. Council reserves at historic low levels.</p> <p>Reserves will need to be replenished within future budgets</p>	30/11/25
15	Budget Balancing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council has struggled to achieve a balanced budget position for a number of years. Forecast for current year is an overspend position of £19m. Reserves insufficient to balance current year budget. Council has been given approval in-principle for Exceptional Financial Support (day to day costs funded through capital borrowings) 	4	4	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current year budgets monitored on a regular basis. Forward forecasting through to March 2029 reported on a prudent basis. Regular conversations with DHLUC re Council's financial position. LGA to undertake a financial assurance review. Transformation programme in place. Financial Recovery Plan required to better inform how the Council 	4	4	16	ED/SB	Ongoing	<p>Council has received in-principle agreement to fund day to day costs through Exceptional Financial Support.</p> <p>EFS covers a total of £52.8m over two years, split: 24/25 - £20.8m 25/26 - £32.0m</p> <p>Council utilised £10m of EFS in 24/25, below the approved amount.</p> <p>Financial recovery plan to</p>	30/11/25

	for 2024/25 and 2025/26.				will achieve future sustainable budgets.						be put in place to limit Council exposure to EFS and repayment of borrowings to date.	



INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE

(Children in Care)

ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025

The IRO report is presented to the Senior Leadership Team and Corporate Parenting Board in accordance with the Children and Young people's Act 2008 and subsequent statutory guidance published in 2010 (IRO Handbook).

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Introduction

This Annual Report covers the period from April 2024 to March 2025 and has been prepared by the IRO Service in accordance with statutory requirements. Its purpose is to provide the Corporate Parenting Board and senior leadership with a comprehensive overview of the Council's performance in supporting children in the care of the local authority.

The information presented draws on multiple data sources, including Eclipse case management reports, statutory annual returns, Annex A submissions, manual data collection, and both regional and national datasets. A key priority identified in last year's report was the need to enhance performance management reporting. The council has since introduced a dedicated Power BI dashboard, which has significantly improved access to and analysis of critical data, however this was not available until part way through the year so we have not been able to utilise its full potential to inform this report. The dashboard also requires further development for it to fully reflect the breadth of the experiences of children in care in Halton.

Halton's IRO Service

The IRO Service operates within the statutory framework of the IRO Handbook, which guides care planning, placement, and review for children in care. The service also aligns with the 2023 Children's Social Care National Framework, which promotes family-based care, stability, and nurturing relationships.

Halton's Children in Care IRO team comprises of seven experienced social worker professionals, most with prior management experience. Co-location with the Children in Care, Care Leavers, and Fostering teams supports collaboration, effective communication, and IRO visibility across the wider service.

Halton's IROs actively contribute to regional and national practice development through participation in the North West IRO Managers Group, the National IRO Advisory Group, and joint forums with Cafcass and the judiciary. This outward facing engagement ensures that Halton's voice informs broader strategic discussions and supports best practice across the sector.

Halton's Children in Care Population

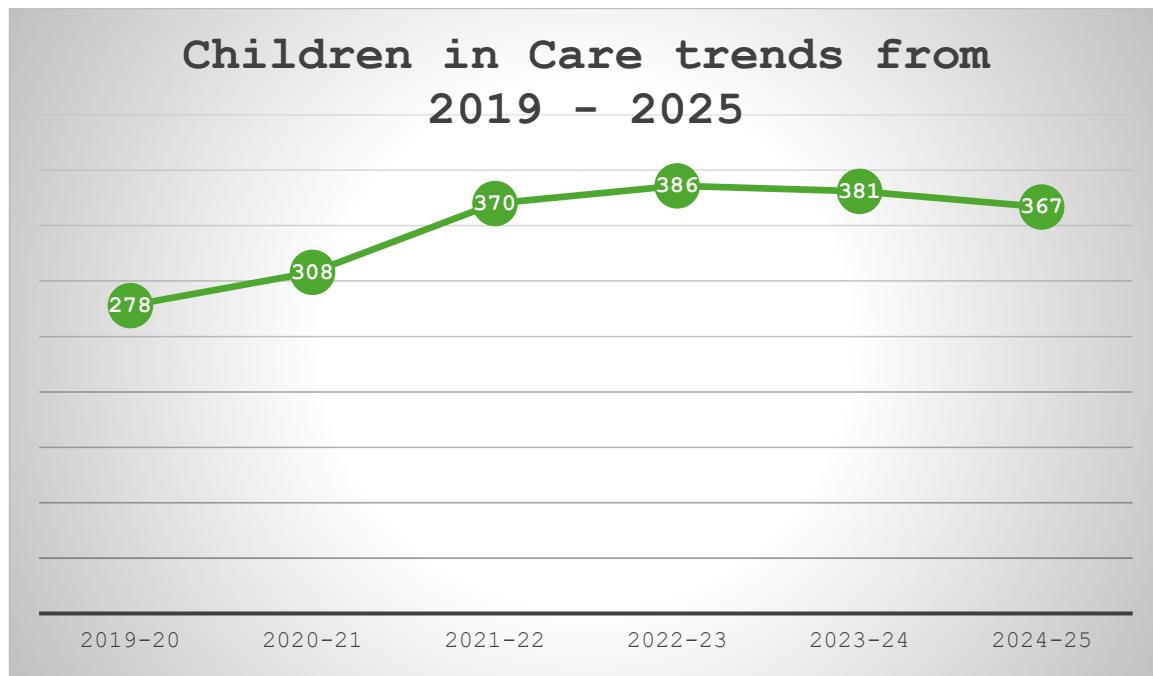
The total number of children in care in Halton has steadily decreased over the past three years, from 386 at the end of 2023 to 381 in 2024, and further to 367 by the end of 2025 — representing an overall reduction of approximately 5%. This downward trend contrasts with the patterns observed across our statistical neighbours, the North West region, and national figures, which have shown more variable year-on-year fluctuations. Halton's sustained reduction reflects the deliberate and focused work across Children's Services to support children in remaining safely within their families. However, our rate per 10,000 children remains comparatively high. If the current downward trend continues, we anticipate aligning more closely with both regional and national averages. Key contributing factors include strengthened assessment

processes, improved planning, and the effective use of the Public Law Outline — all of which are central to our ongoing Improvement Plan. Looking ahead, we aim to build on this progress through the implementation of several targeted strategies:

- **Strengthening Early Help and Child in Need services**, including enhanced Family Hub support to prevent escalation of concerns.
- **Improving use of the Public Law Outline (PLO)** and introducing Family Network Meeting Coordinators to support family-led safety planning.
- **Prioritising the timely review of care plans** for children living with parents or relatives and progressing cases where local authority involvement may no longer be required.

Children in Care Trends (2016–2024)

The graph below illustrates the trends in the number of children in care across Halton, North West, Statistical Neighbours, and England from 2016 to 2024.



The Role of IROs in Reducing the Need for Care

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) play a vital role in supporting Halton's efforts to safely reduce the number of children entering or remaining in care. Their work focuses on improving oversight, promoting family-led solutions, and ensuring that children's voices are central to planning.

Key contributions include:

- **Promoting Timely Planning**: IROs critically review care plans, challenge delays, and advocate for permanence through family-based alternatives where appropriate.

- **Supporting Family Solutions:** They encourage the use of Family Network Meetings and monitor reunification plans to ensure they are safe and sustainable.
- **Driving Quality and Accountability:** Through regular audits and feedback, IROs help improve practice, inform training, and shape service development.
- **Championing the Child's Voice:** IROs ensure children are heard in all decisions and advocate for less intrusive options when safe and appropriate.

These actions contribute to more effective, child-centred care planning and better long-term outcomes.

Care planning in Halton follows a clear hierarchy of permanence, prioritising:

- Reunification with parents where safe and appropriate
- Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) with relatives
- Long-term fostering (with kinship, Halton-approved, or independent carers)
- Short-term residential care
- Adoption (as a last resort)

Achieving permanence provides children with legal certainty, emotional security, and reduces the need for ongoing statutory involvement.

Permanence Outcomes for Children in Halton

Permanence Plan Achieved	2023–2024	2024–2025
Return to parents (no order)	39%	39%
SGO granted	27%	15%
Adopted	10%	13%
Staying Put arrangements	16%	21%
Matched to HBC carer	2%	0
Matched to IFA carer	3%	2%
Move to independence	3%	10%

The number of permanence plans secured through Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) has declined. This trend is partly due to delays in completing required assessments and the complexities inherent in

some arrangements. Factors such as coordinating family time and confirming financial support packages have contributed to delays, impacting the overall timeliness and progression of permanence planning.

To support improvement, this area will be tracked quarterly moving forward, enabling earlier identification of emerging themes. IROs play a critical role in this process and must ensure that such issues are identified through their oversight. Where delays or barriers are evident, these should be raised through formal escalation and challenge. This approach will help surface systemic issues and drive service improvements.

Strengthening the IRO role in monitoring, challenging, and influencing timely permanence planning will remain a key focus over the coming year.

Placement sufficiency remains a key issue, particularly in matching children to foster carers.

The placement of Halton's children in care.

Current Placement Type on 31 March	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Foster placement with relative or friend	74	59	53
	Inside LA: 50	Inside LA: 43	Inside LA: 30
	Outside LA:24	Outside LA:16	Outside LA: 23
Placement with other foster carer	163	176	170
	Inside LA: 95	Inside LA: 85	Inside LA: 84
	Outside LA:68	Outside LA: 91	Outside LA: 86
Secure Unit	1	0	0
Homes and hostels	44	43	57
Hostels and other supportive residential placements	32	29	34
Residential Schools	0	0	0
Other residential settings (NHS, Mother/Baby)	4	9	3
Placed for adoption (including placed with former foster carer)	1	6	3
Placed with own parents	66	52	42
In lodgings, residential employment or living independently	0	0	0
Other placement	1	10	5
Total	386	381	367

Placement Trends and Analysis (2022–2025)

As of 31 March 2025, Halton's children in care population stood at 367, continuing a downward trend from 386 in 2022–23. This reduction likely reflects the impact of some practice improvements around the Public Law Outline, some improved stability of the frontline workforce and a whole service commitment to the Stable Homes, Built on Love Strategy.

Foster placements with relatives or friends have shown a steady decline, particularly those located within Halton. This trend suggests ongoing challenges in identifying kinship carers who are both available and able to safely meet the needs of children. The reduction may also reflect broader systemic barriers, which IROs are well-placed to identify and challenge through their oversight and escalation processes. In contrast, placements with other foster carers have remained relatively stable, though there is a growing reliance on placements outside the borough, indicating ongoing pressures on local placement sufficiency.

There has been a significant increase in the use of homes and hostels, rising from 43 to 57 over the past year. This upward trend clearly reflects two key factors: a shift in the age profile of children in care—with more older young people transitioning into semi-independent living—and ongoing challenges in securing suitable foster placements for those aged 16 and over.

The data suggests that the difficulty in identifying and matching older children with appropriate foster carers is directly contributing to the increased reliance on semi-independent provisions. This is an area that requires continued scrutiny, and IROs are expected to monitor and escalate concerns where placement sufficiency or suitability is impacting care planning.

Some of these young people represent separated migrant children but the number of these young people has remained stable during the year. Similarly, supportive residential placements have seen a modest rise, while use of secure units and residential schools remains minimal.

The number of children placed with their own parents has decreased year-on-year, this reflects the improved practice within teams and a strengthened management oversight and tracking of children entering the PLO process and the strengthening of pre proceedings. Adoption placements peaked in 2023–24 but declined slightly in 2024–25, while other specialist placements (e.g. NHS or mother/baby units) remained low and variable.

These trends highlight both progress and ongoing challenges. While the overall reduction in the care population is encouraging, the data points to continued pressures in placement sufficiency—particularly for local foster care—and the need for sustained focus on permanence planning, reunification, and support for older children transitioning to independence.

IRO Practice and Performance Updates

Good Practice Notifications

In the period 1st April 2024 to the 31st March 2025 the IRO's have raised 45 Good Practice Notifications for social workers from the Child in Need and Children in Care teams.

The use of Good Practice Notifications is an important tool in promoting high-quality social work with children in care. These acknowledgements serve multiple purposes:

- **Reinforcing Positive Practice:** Recognising effective, child-centred work encourages continued high standards and professional excellence.
- **Promoting a Learning Culture:** Sharing examples of good practice supports reflective learning and continuous improvement across teams.
- **Boosting Morale:** Acknowledgement of good work contributes to staff motivation, job satisfaction, and retention.
- **Encouraging Consistency:** Highlighting strong practice helps establish clear benchmarks and promotes consistency across the service.
- **Improving Outcomes:** Ultimately, recognising and replicating good practice supports better outcomes for children through timely, well-informed, and effective care planning.

Good Practice Example 1: Positive impact for child – The social worker has taken her time in considering the right final plan for the two siblings. Her communication with me has been excellent and when I have queried things with her around prospective carers for the children, she has found out the answers and replied promptly. She is a curious social worker which has benefited the children she works hard and is passionate about the children she works for and has gone above and beyond to help them settle into their new placement, which has included working late and buying them things to help reassure them.

Good Practice Example 2: Positive Impact for child - I am providing this good practice notification following seeing the later life letter that the social worker has prepared for the child prior to the case being reallocated.

It is important to acknowledge the outstanding work done in preparing the later life letter for the child during the reallocation of her case. This work really shows how much the social worker cares and how professional she is with making sure the child has a clear and personal record of her journey. The effort put into writing this letter goes above and beyond, showing a deep commitment to the child's well-being. Hopefully, the social workers commitment will be clear to the child who I am sure will be feeling a little upset to lose her as a keyworker and this letter may go some way to support her feeling secure and informed during changes of worker.

This kind of work sets a great example and makes a real difference in the lives of the children social care support. It's a testament to the dedication and hard work that ensures children feel supported and valued throughout their journey.

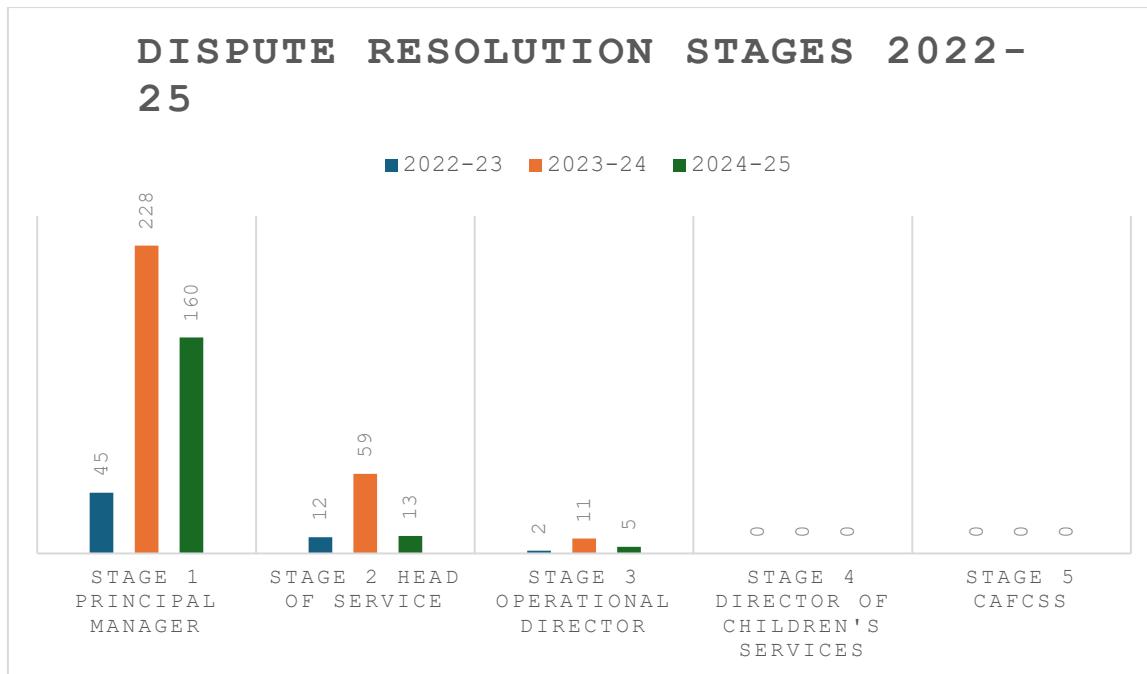
Informal Resolution of Concerns

Ongoing IRO oversight is vital to ensuring care plans are implemented effectively and emerging concerns are addressed promptly. In line with best practice, IROs prioritise informal resolution by engaging early with

social workers and team managers. These interventions are formally recorded using the IRO Oversight & Scrutiny Form on the child's electronic record.

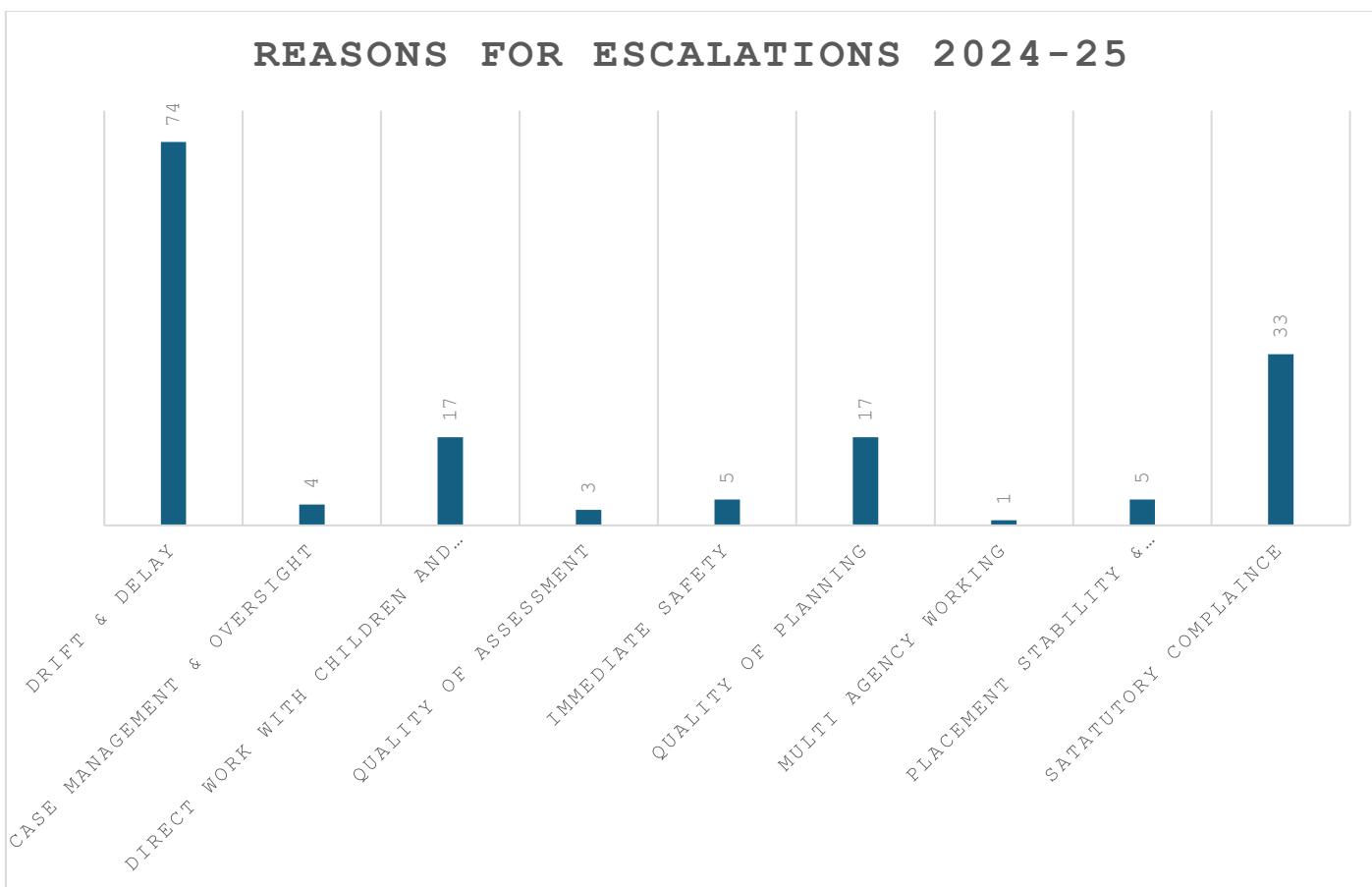
In 2024–2025, IROs recorded 249 informal resolutions. This reflects stronger IRO presence and proactive case oversight. To better evidence the impact of these interventions, a new section has been added to the form to capture impact and outcomes more clearly.

Dispute Resolution



Dispute Resolution: Analysis

- Stage 1 (Service Manager): The majority of disputes continue to be resolved at this stage. There was a sharp increase in 2023–2024 (228 cases), followed by a reduction to 1 in 2024–2025—still significantly higher than 2022–2023 (45). This suggests improved IRO challenge and oversight, though also reflects increased pressures or complexity in care planning.
- Stage 2 (Head of Service): Escalations peaked in 2023–2024 (59), then dropped sharply to 13 in 2024–2025, indicating more effective resolution at Stage 1 or fewer complex disputes requiring senior intervention.
- Stage 3 (Operational Director): Numbers remained low across all years, with a slight peak in 2023–2024. This suggests that most disputes are resolved before reaching senior leadership.
- Stages 4 & 5: No disputes were escalated to the Director of Children's Services or CAFCASS, indicating that all matters were resolved satisfactorily at earlier stages.



Overview of Escalation Themes

The chart above presents nine categories of escalation reasons, reflecting areas where the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) has raised concerns during the year. The total number of escalations is **159**, distributed as follows:

Strengths in IRO Oversight

- **High escalation in Drift & Delay (48.1%)**: Indicates that IROs are actively identifying and challenging delays in progressing care plans, which is critical for timely decision-making and permanency planning.
- **Statutory Compliance (21.4%)**: Reflects strong IRO vigilance in ensuring legal duties are met, safeguarding children's rights.

Areas for Continued Focus

- **Quality of Assessment & Direct Work with Children (11% each)**: These figures suggest that IROs are actively scrutinising both the quality of assessments and the direct engagement with children—critical elements in ensuring that care planning is informed, child-focused, and responsive to individual needs.
- **Quality of Planning (3.2%)**: While lower, this still shows that IROs are raising concerns about the robustness and clarity of care plans.

Lower Escalation Areas

- **Placement Stability, Immediate Safety, Multi-Agency Working, and Case Management:** The relatively low number of escalations in these areas may indicate fewer identified issues or potential under-reporting. A more in-depth qualitative review is recommended to ensure that these critical aspects of care planning are being appropriately monitored and challenged where necessary.

The data demonstrates that IROs are effectively using their oversight role to challenge delays and statutory breaches—two of the most critical risks to children in care. Their focus on assessment quality and multi-agency working also supports improved planning outcomes. However, the relatively low escalation in planning quality and placement stability suggests a need for continued vigilance and possibly deeper scrutiny.

Timeliness of Reviews

In 2024–2025, 84% (830 of 992) of children in care reviews were held within statutory timescales—matching the performance from the previous year.

The primary reasons for delays included incomplete care plans and review documentation, which postponed meetings. Additionally, changes in social workers impacted timeliness, particularly where new workers were not promptly informed of review dates or where supervision did not adequately focus on upcoming reviews.

The service remains committed to achieving 95–100% timeliness. To support this, we will continue working closely with team managers and review administrative processes to improve coordination and planning.

Mid-Point Reviews (MPRs)

Mid-Point Reviews are a vital part of the care planning process for Children in Care, helping to maintain momentum, ensure accountability, and keep the child's needs central between statutory reviews.

A total 269 MPRs were completed during the year—an improvement on the previous year. This reflects ongoing efforts to strengthen IRO oversight and scrutiny. MPRs are a key mechanism for improving outcomes and securing timely permanence for children, and we remain focused on embedding them consistently.

Children's Participation in their Reviews.

	2024-2025	2023-2024	2022-2023
No of Reviews held	980	1080	1027
Reviews for children under the age of 4	215(22%)	246 (23%)	227 (22%)
Review for children over the age of 4	765	834	800
Children attended their review	471(62%)	504 (61%)	475 (59%)

Child participated through advocate or through other means consultation, discussion with IRO etc	288(37%)	311 (37%)	290 (37%)
Child did not participate in their review	18(2%)	19 (2%)	35 (4%)

Key Insights of children participation in their review meetings:

- Overall Reviews Held:** The number of reviews decreased from 1,080 in 2023–2024 to 980 in 2024–2025, reflecting a reduction in the care population and review frequency.
- Attendance Rates:** Attendance by children over age 4 has gradually improved—from 59% in 2022–2023 to 62% in 2024–2025—indicating stronger engagement efforts.
- Participation Through Other Means:** Remained steady at 37% across all three years, showing consistent use of advocates, consultation forms, or IRO discussions.
- Non-Participation:** Dropped from 4% to 2%, suggesting improved follow-up and flexibility in how children are supported to contribute.

We have undertaken focused development work with Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) during the year to strengthen the engagement of children in their Child in Care Reviews. While some progress has been made, several barriers to meaningful participation remain. These include the influence of adults in the child's life, who may seek to use the review to explore matters of importance to them at that time, which can sometimes unintentionally overshadow the child's voice. The structure of review meetings is also not always as child-focused as they should be. Additionally, when children initially decline to participate, IROs do not routinely revisit the conversation, missing opportunities to re-engage them in ways that might feel safer or more accessible. This highlights the need for more creative, flexible approaches that go beyond traditional formats and truly centre the child's experience and preferences.

To address these challenges, IROs did in the latter part of the reporting year develop a plan to 'reclaim children's reviews for children'. The impact of this will be reported in the next annual report but some of the measures we have taken have included strengthening our engagement with children when they come into care and before their first review and the quality assurance of IRO visits and contacts with children. Developing a more dynamic and ongoing approach to engagement, ensuring that when a child states that they do not wish to attend that we revisit the conversation at a later time and in a different way, recognising that timing and trust are key. We are actively engaging with children and young people to explore alternative formats for reviews—such as child-led agendas, visual tools, and more informal settings—that may feel more comfortable, inclusive, and empowering. This approach aims to ensure that their voices are central to the review process and that the environment supports meaningful participation. This work is in its infancy, we are exploring the use of QR codes for virtual contribution to service development and exploring how we can use the Lundy Model with children and young people to develop our service. Training and reflective sessions with IROs and other relevant adults in the child's life will be strengthened to reinforce the importance of the child's voice and to challenge unconscious biases that may limit participation.

Additionally, we will pilot the use of creative engagement methods, such as digital storytelling or one-page profiles to help children express their views in ways that feel authentic to them. Ultimately, our aim is to embed a culture where every child feels heard, respected, and meaningfully involved in decisions about their care.

Year	Number of Reviews	% Held in timescales	Number of AdjudGED Review
2024 - 2025	992	84%	176
2023 - 2024	1078	84%	262
2022 - 2023	1027	79%	222
2021 - 2022	924	75%	163

We can see from the data above that:-

- Number of Reviews: Increased from 924 in 2021–2022 to a peak of 1,078 in 2023–2024, then slightly declined to 992 in 2024–2025.
- % Held in Timescales: Improved steadily from 75% in 2021–2022 to 84% in the last two years, indicating better timeliness.
 - Number of AdjudGED Reviews: This rose significantly from 163 to 262 between 2021 and 2024, but dropped to 176 in 2024–2025, work has been completed during the year to address the standing down (adjournment) of reviews due to the lack of documentation and this accounts for the reduction of adjournments this year and we will continue to address this next year and hope to reduce this further. Compliance with the statutory 20 working day timeframe for holding adjourned reviews stands at 73% for the year—an improvement of 2% compared to the previous year. While this reflects positive progress, it remains an area for continued focus to ensure full compliance and consistency across all cases.

IRO Visits and Contact with Children

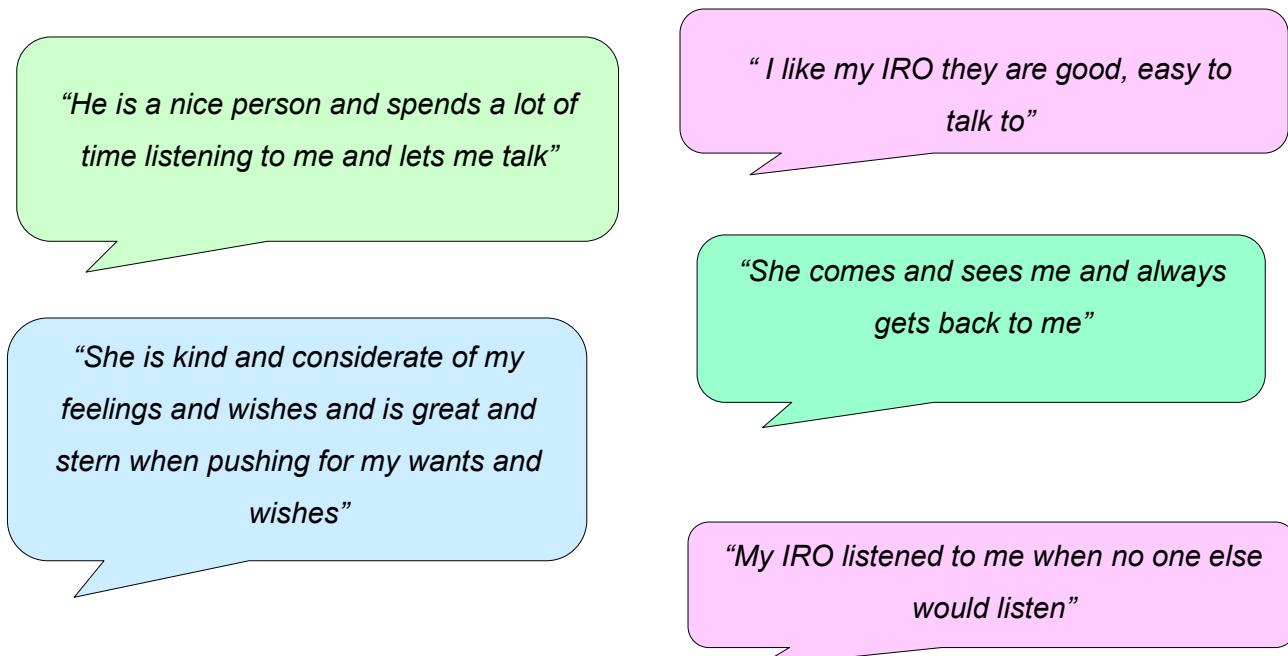
IROs are expected to visit or contact children when they enter care and before each review to build relationships and ensure their views are reflected in planning. Reports are being developed so we can report on the number and timeliness of visits in the future.

Quality assurance identified inconsistencies in how visits are recorded, with some lacking detail. Work is ongoing to improve consistency and ensure all contacts clearly reflect the child's views and engagement in their care planning.

While caseload pressures have limited the consistent use of contact during Mid-Point Reviews, this remains a priority. Building trusting relationships with IROs is key to empowering children, particularly where the IRO may be the most consistent professional in their care journey.

Feedback

The Lead Independent Conference and Review Service Manager met with some children and young people who attend the Children in Care Council and this is what they had to say about some of Halton's IROs.



IRO's making a difference for children:

- A new IRO to our service picked up a young person who rarely engaged with his reviews or his previous IRO. This IRO spoke with his carer and asked about his likes and dislikes and discovered he loves aeroplanes. During an introductory visit she talked to him about his interests and told him about a place in North Wales where you can see the RAF jets fly past and this really sparked his interest and he is now talking to his IRO about planes but also about his plans and hopes for the future. It is hoped this relationship will continue to develop and he will attend and maybe chair his reviews in the not too distant future.
- A child in care whose progress was hindered by significant delays in care planning meetings and a lack of oversight, raising concerns about statutory compliance and the risk of drift in implementing the agreed care plan. The IRO identified these issues, including missed planning milestones and incomplete documentation, and took proactive steps to address them. Rather than immediately escalating the matter formally, the IRO engaged in informal challenge, directly liaising with the newly allocated manager to confirm whether the case had been appropriately handed over. This led to confirmation that the new social worker was aware of the outstanding actions and had begun rescheduling the overdue care planning meeting and Child in Care review. As a result of the IRO's timely intervention, management oversight was re-established, key planning events were set in

motion, and professionals were held accountable with clear expectations for timely reporting. This approach helped prevent further drift, reinforced the importance of progressing the child's care plan, and preserved placement stability. Ultimately, the IRO's involvement ensured that child's needs remained a priority and that planning for their future continued without unnecessary delay.

Independent Visitors and Advocacy Service

Independent Visitors and the Advocacy Service continue to be provided by our commissioned service with NYAS. For the year 2024/25 NYAS have:

- provided advocacy support for 67 children and young people in care (this is a 27% increase on last year).
- At the 31/03/25 8 young people are matched with an Independent Visitor (IV).
- There are 14 young people waiting to be matched, recruitment of IVs and matching is more difficult for our out of borough children which is the majority of this cohort.
- 4 IVs are trained and ready to match which will reduce the waiting list to 10.

This commissioned service will be reviewed next year.

Progress on 2024-2025 priorities

Priority 1: Improving IRO Effectiveness and Consistency to support timely Care Planning and Permanence for children and young people.

Over the 2024–2025 reporting period, Halton's Independent Reviewing Service has taken a number of targeted steps to strengthen the effectiveness of IROs across all aspects of children's care planning, with a particular emphasis on achieving permanence. Activity includes:

- **Workforce Stability and Continuity:** The transition of two agency IROs into permanent posts and the recruitment of a part-time IRO have enhanced team stability, supporting greater continuity for children and improved oversight of care plans.
- **Caseload Management.** During this reporting year whilst caseloads have remained above the recommended 50–70 range, peaking at 79 during the year, children in care review meetings have been held at the required frequency. However, high caseloads did limit the depth of IRO scrutiny between reviews. The return of an IRO from long-term absence in March 2025 is expected to ease pressure in 2025–2026. This will enable IRO's to dedicate more time to scrutinising permanence plans and supporting timely progression in between review meetings.
- **Enhanced Performance Reporting:** The introduction of a dedicated Power BI dashboard has significantly improved the service's ability to monitor key performance indicators in real time. This has enabled more consistent tracking of review timeliness, mid-point reviews, and the progression of care plans, supporting early identification of practice gaps.

- **Reflective Supervision and Peer Learning:** Monthly reflective supervision sessions provide a structured space for IROs to review their practice, engage with audit feedback, and reflect on complex cases. These sessions are complemented by team meetings and the aiming high meetings that focus on shared learning and alignment with service priorities.
- **Practice Standards and Expectations:** Clear expectations have been reinforced around key elements of the IRO role, including the use of mid-point reviews, escalation processes, and the recording of the child's voice. This has supported greater consistency in how IROs approach their statutory responsibilities.
- **Professional Development:** Targeted training and guest speaker sessions have been used to deepen understanding of key issues, such as permanence planning, trauma-informed practice, and legal frameworks. These opportunities have helped align practice across the team and ensure a shared understanding of best practice.
- **Monthly case audits:** these continue to consider the effectiveness of the IRO in planning for individual children. Most audit gradings fall within the 'Requires Improvement to be Good' category. The findings are used to drive quality, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement. Our aim for 2025/2026 is to see a minimum of 25% of audits graded as 'Good' and none graded as inadequate. During the year monthly data collection started see below:-

Month	Good	RI	IA
February 25		100%	
March 25		83%	17%

This will be measured every quarter going forward so that we can add and review the progress in the next annual report.

Priority 2. Strengthening the Voice of the Child in Review Meetings

Ensuring that children and young people are meaningfully involved in their review meetings remains a core priority for Halton's Independent Reviewing Service. Over the past year, several steps have been taken to improve how children contribute to their reviews and how their views are captured and acted upon:

- **Flexible and Child-Centred Approaches:** IROs have continued to adapt their approach to suit the individual needs and preferences of each child. This includes offering different formats for participation—such as virtual attendance, written contributions, or pre-meeting discussions—to ensure that every child has a voice, even if they choose not to attend in person. A breakdown of how children chose to participate is below. ([Link to Section](#)) We have maintained a strong focus on child-centred review meetings, ensuring that the child's voice remains central throughout the process. Partner agencies are expected to contribute meaningfully during the care planning stage, rather than at the review, to support a more coordinated and proactive approach to planning.

Review meetings are deliberately kept small to create a more comfortable environment for children. In consultation with each child, we ensure they have a say in who attends their meeting—respecting their preferences and promoting their engagement and participation.

- **Follow-Up with Non-Attending Young People:** Where children and young people do not attend their review meetings, IROs have made proactive efforts to meet, or have discussion with them after the review. These conversations aim to understand the reasons for non-attendance and explore what could be done differently to make the process more inclusive and comfortable. Feedback from these discussions is used to inform future planning and adapt the review process accordingly.
- **Improved Recording of Consultation:** The service has placed greater emphasis on how children's views are recorded and reflected in care plans. IROs are expected to clearly document how the child has been consulted, what their views are, and how these have influenced decision-making. This is monitored through regular case audits and supervision.
- **Use of Advocacy and Support Tools:** Where appropriate, children are supported by independent advocates to help them express their views. IROs also make use of tools such as "All About Me" forms and creative methods to help younger children or those with communication needs share their thoughts and feelings.
- **Audit and Feedback Loops:** Monthly audits now include a focus on the quality of child participation and how well their voice is represented in the review process. Findings are used to identify good practice and areas for improvement, which are then addressed through supervision and team learning.
- **Ongoing Development:** The team continues to explore new ways to engage children and young people more effectively, including through feedback surveys, consultation with the Children in Care Council, and learning from national best practice. The IRO team is committed to actively engaging with the Children in Care Council to ensure that our service development is shaped by the voices of those with lived experience. Through regular dialogue with the participation lead, joint workshops, and feedback sessions, we work in partnership to understand what matters most to children and young people in care. Their insights directly inform our practice, helping us to improve review processes, enhance communication, and ensure that every child's rights, needs, and aspirations are at the heart of our service. This collaborative approach strengthens accountability and ensures that our work remains responsive, inclusive, and child-centred.

These efforts reflect a sustained commitment to ensuring that children are not only heard but that their views are central to care planning and decision-making.

Together these three priorities last year have contributed to a more consistent and accountable IRO service, with improved oversight of children's care plans and a stronger focus on achieving timely, child-centred outcomes.

Safeguarding Units Focus for 2025 – 2026

Priority 1: Strengthening IRO Effectiveness in Permanence Planning

Ensuring timely and effective permanence planning remains a key focus. In 2025–2026, the service will:

- Embed permanence-focused discussions in monthly reflective supervision
- Introduce tracking tools in Eclipse to monitor permanence progress
- Deliver targeted training on permanence pathways (e.g. SGO, adoption)
- Strengthen use of the Dispute Resolution Process to escalate delays
- Promote multi-agency collaboration through mid-point reviews and planning meetings
- Prioritise the child's voice in all planning decisions
- Review step-down processes to ensure sustained progress post-intervention

These actions align with Halton's wider improvement plan and national guidance, with progress monitored through audits, performance data, and feedback.

Priority 2: Enhancing Children and Young People's Participation

Improving how children contribute to their reviews is a core priority. The service will:

- Offer flexible, age-appropriate consultation methods
- Adapt review formats to be more child-friendly
- Follow up with non-attenders to understand and address barriers
- Improve recording of how children's views influence decisions
- Build trust through consistent, relational contact
- Monitor participation data to identify and address engagement gaps

These efforts support Halton's commitment to child-centred practice and will be informed by ongoing feedback from children and professionals.

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