

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board  
**DATE:** 11<sup>th</sup> September 2008  
**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director – Children & Young People  
**SUBJECT:** Joint Area Review

### 1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT:

To summarise the key findings of the recent Joint Area Review in Halton.

### 2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (i) the report be noted; and
- (ii) the improvement plan be endorsed.

### 3.0 BACKGROUND:

Halton's Joint Area Review was undertaken against a change of methodology from April 2007. This change resulted in a 'harder test' in which the emphasis was upon vulnerable groups. This coupled with two additional investigations that concentrated on under performance meant that Halton was inspected upon.

- Children in need of safeguarding
- Children in Care
- Children with learning difficulties and disabilities
- The impact of the partners' strategy on improving infant mortality, breastfeeding and obesity rates
- The impact of integrated youth support provision on young people's involvement in planning and delivery of local services, their engagement in youth work and in addressing the level of young people not in education, or training.
- Investigations also took place around service management and capacity to improve.

### 4.0 FINDINGS:

4.1 The result of the investigations were as follows:

Safeguarding	Outstanding
Children in Care	Good
Learning Difficulties and Disabilities	Good
Service Management	Good
Capacity to Improve	Outstanding
Health	Adequate
Youth Support	Good

The main findings were summarised as follows:

- Safeguarding is outstanding. The quality of early intervention is excellent and there is a wide range of responsive and locally-based services for children and families. Sustained high performance, including child protection, is underpinned by very strong joint working, robust policies and procedures. The safeguarding board provides very effective leadership.
- Local services for looked after children are good. Multi-agency strategic planning is good. Care planning and review are effective, including well-targeted health and educational support. Children live in safe, stable placements and receive good care. Care leavers are well supported but there are low numbers in education, employment or training or in permanent accommodation.
- The contribution of local services to improving outcomes for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. The council and its partners have made rapid progress over the last three years in developing a well-planned strategy for inclusion. The partnership gives a very strong strategic lead for driving improvement, which is supported by a wide range of agencies. Provision for children with complex needs, especially young children, is good and very well coordinated but support for those with lower level needs is not always as easily accessible.
- The impact of the partners' strategy on infant mortality, breastfeeding and obesity outcomes is adequate. Effective strategic action has been taken by the PCT, the council and partners to increase resources and prioritise improvement. Staff at all levels are well motivated to make improvements. An appropriate range of inter-agency activities has recently been put in place resulting in some early signs of improvement.
- The impact of the evolving integrated youth support structure on young people's engagement is good. There have been sustained improvements in provision over time. The local authority and its partners are very responsive to young people's views and opinions. The integrated youth structure is enabling more effective joint work and planning but some key management decisions necessary to embed the strategy have yet to be made.
- Service management is good, with outstanding capacity to drive further improvement. Highly effective leadership provides clear direction, and good systems, processes and plans are in place to support front-line delivery by committed and capable staff. Achievement is being embedded and built upon and ambitions for further development are challenging. The partnership is self-aware about areas for improvement and can show a track record of successfully responding to underperformance. More integrated, medium-term financial planning across the partnership is an area for development.

4.2 In general terms this meant that:

- The combined score of the 'core' investigation makes Halton the most successful JAR in the North West to date (only Lancashire, Tameside and Blackburn left to report).
- Halton is the only North West authority to secure outstanding for safeguarding (one of only six nationally).

- Halton's successful JAR puts it in the top 4 nationally.

4.3 However a number of key improvements were highlighted. These could be categorised under two sections. The first is improvement in outcomes and secondly an improvement in processes.

#### Outcome Improvements

- Improve attendance, attainment, and achievement of young people not in education, employment or training
- Improve health outcomes for childhood obesity, breastfeeding and reduce infant mortality.
- Improve numbers and attainment of Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training
- Increase numbers of young people in Permanent Accommodation

#### Process Improvements

- Approach to Equality and Diversity to be more robust and address the needs of all communities in Halton
- Further embed safeguarding principles in the Borough
- Improve placement options for children in care to ensure their wishes and needs are comprehensively addressed.
- Improve Support, Education and Transition Arrangements for Children and Young People with LDD.
- Improve SEN process and SEN Reviews
- Improve Transition Planning and Reviews as a means of promoting better outcomes for children and young people with LDD
- Improve Medium and Long Term Financial Planning
- Improve Data Collection and Intelligence Systems
- Improve Accountability Arrangements in Children's Trust

### **5.0 NEXT STEPS:**

In light of the recommendations for improvement a multi-agency improvement plan has been established. See appendix 2.

### **6.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The JAR focused upon a number of specific areas as part of the corporate priorities.

### **7.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

The inspectors looked at a number of council specific themes including capacity to improve and service management.

### **8.0 RISK MANAGEMENT**

The lack of progress in improving outcomes for children and young people in Halton is the principal risk of not implementing the recommendations from the inspection.