

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

DATE: 12th September 2022

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, People

PORTFOLIO: Children & Young People

SUBJECT: Halton Local Area SEND Strategy 2021-25

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To advise the board on the progress and updates in relation to the local area SEND Strategy and current pressures.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

- i) **Members are asked to consider the presentation and raise any questions they may have on SEND provision and support, the local area strategy and its implementation.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 EHCP Position

3.1.1 Throughout the 2021/21 Halton in common with other local authority areas has seen an unprecedented growth in demand for Education Health and Care Needs Assessments. The number of applications for EHC needs assessments reached 353 for the academic year in July. This represents a 35% increase in demand with that demand accelerating towards the end of the year (fig1)

Year	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
Autumn Term	31	61	88	89	87	61	128
Spring Term	28	41	49	92	84	69	89
Summer Term	50	70	105	83	56	105	136
Total	109	172	242	264	227	235	353

3.1.3 Halton is slightly lower than its statistical neighbours and nationally with regards to the number of applications received that are converted into a final EHCP with 12% of applications not meeting assessment criteria or assessments not meeting the threshold for issuing an Education Health and Care Plan.

3.1.4 The rise in parental applications over the year is becoming cause for concern. Parental applications now account for almost 20% of applications. Applications

from parents are often missing information so do sometimes result in delays in the application process due to having to request further information from parents and or their educational provision.

- 3.1.5 The upsurge in demand has placed considerable pressure on the capacity in both the SEN Assessment Team and those services that provide advice and assessments that contribute towards developing EHCPs such as the Educational Psychology Service, Speech and Language Therapy Services, Occupational and Physio Therapy Services etc. As a result Halton's ability to meet its statutory 20 week completion rate for EHCPs has fallen throughout the year, although is still in line with current national trends as all areas are experiencing similar pressures, increase in applications and decline in 20 week completion rate.
- 3.1.6 The decline in completion rates is due to three factors. The first is the increase in EHC needs assessments coming through the system placing an increased caseload for each assessment co-ordinator. Caseloads currently sit at an average of 180 per co-ordinator up from 100 four years ago. The SENAT are currently operating below capacity with a 25% vacancy rate for assessment co-ordinators due to pressures on recruitment. The situation is projected to improve across the autumn as additional staff and capacity are recruited but this will take time to be reflected in the figures.
- 3.1.7 The second factor has been an ongoing lack of capacity within the admin hub. The admin hub is responsible for monitoring the SENAT inbox, maintaining and moving workflows forward on the system, receiving and logging new applications and annual reviews on synergy and sending out requests for professional advice. Lack of capacity and delays in a number of these areas have led to cases going over timescales with decisions to assess being taken within the 6 week statutory timescale being impacted as a result. SENAT and Admin are working closely to streamline and improve the systems and will also improve once further admin capacity is resolved due to recruitment challenges post Covid (again a national issue but impacting upon Halton too). To support this a new suite of management information reporting is being developed and embedded to facilitate tighter monitoring of the EHCP process.
- 3.1.8 The final factor that is impacting the timeliness of plan delivery is the increasing complexity of cases and the ongoing challenge to find appropriate provision for a number of children and young people. In addition to the current sufficiency challenges faced by the local area with respect to its in borough specialist provision, the availability of more regional independent school places is under increasing pressure creating delays in finalising plans as provision placements are sought.
- 3.1.9 Despite this challenging outlook there does continue to be positive progress made to improve the quality and impact of EHCPs. In July a new SEN Assessment Team Manager joined Halton SENAT, this was a role that has been vacant for some time. Since Starting the manager has been focussed on addressing and managing the capacity issues in the team as well as focussing on improving process clarity and communications with families and schools. Quality monitoring and assurance continues to be a priority despite the pressure faced by the team. The assistant DCO (health colleague) for Halton is now co-located part time with the assessment

team to support better quality and partnership working with respect to the health elements of EHCP's.

- 3.1.10 A key component of the EHCP process is the multiagency EHCP partnership panel. This panel provides moderation and support to the local authority in its decision making regarding whether to undertake assessments for SEN and, following assessment, whether to issue a statutory EHCP. Following feedback and reflecting on the current demands and pressures in the system the EHCP Partnership has been revised and reviewed over the summer. This has resulted in a revision to the terms of reference for the panel clarifying its role and powers and increasing the representative range of membership.
- 3.1.11 The EHCP Partnership Panel also operates, on behalf of Halton Local Authority, as the placement and admitting authority for all Halton children and young people with an EHCP. As such its communications with families and schools are critical in ensuring that decisions are well understood and clearly conveyed. Part of the review of the panel therefore has been to provide clarity to schools and families going forward on the local criteria used for decision making. This will support better applications for assessment and reduce the number of instances where decisions are challenged.

3.2 Sufficiency

3.2.1 As described above the growth in demand for EHCPs is placing a huge stress on the availability of specialist places in Halton. Fig 2 shows the growth of EHCPs over the last 5 years by school phase and type.

3.2.2

EHCP Halton %	Jan-18	Jan-19	Jan-20	Jan-21	Jan-22
State-funded nursery	0.0	1.2	0.4	1.8	2.0
State-funded primary	0.5	0.9	1.5	1.9	2.3
State-funded secondary	0.7	1.0	1.2	1.5	1.9
State-funded special school	98.0	98.1	97.9	97.2	98.6
Pupil referral unit	2.1	6.3	6.7	8.6	7.4
All Phases	2.3	2.7	3.3	3.7	4.2

- 3.2.3 This represents an increase in the number of EHCPs in Halton from less than 800 in 2017 to 1362 as at August 2022. This increase is faster than that national rate of increase but still leaves Halton in line with many of its statistical neighbours in terms of the proportion of EHCPs.
- 3.2.4 This growth rate in the proportion of pupils with an EHCP has been managed in part by working with Halton's mainstream schools to improve the rate of pupils with EHCPs that they support. Historically Halton has a lower proportion of pupils with an EHCP in mainstream schools than regional and national comparators.
- 3.2.5 Halton is an outlier in the inclusion of its mainstream academies. In Halton, less mainstream academies have children and young people with EHCP plans than those supported with EHCP plans in mainstream academies nationally. There are a

number of strategies in place to support mainstream schools to be more inclusive including the development of nurture provision, investment in specialist teaching and advisory support and educational psychology support and a more robust detail of sharing outcomes of decisions and assumptions in making placement decisions. This has resulted in great progress being made in this area and halving Halton's gap to national in the proportion of new EHCPs delivered in mainstream. Halton now has 36.4% of pupils with an EHCP in mainstream compared to 42% nationally.

3.2.7 However the increase in complexity and number of pupils with SEND has placed huge pressure on specialist places with all special schools and resource bases oversubscribed for 2022. To meet this demand a number of capital developments have been put in place over the last 3 years including the following:

School	Age Range	Specialism	Capacity	Additional Accommodation
Ashley	11–19	ASD; Social Communication Needs	112 places <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 70 aged 11-16 • 42 aged 16-19 	7 places at satellite provision at The Heath School Bungalow added September 2020 resulting in overall capacity of 119 places comprising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 77 aged 11-16 • 42 aged 16-19
Brookfields	2–11	ASD, Cognition and Learning	73	18 places at satellite provision at The Grange School (9) Sept 2020 & (9) Sept 2021. Overall capacity of 91 places. SEND consultation ending 09/06/21 suggests 92 places available at Brookfields and 18 places at the satellite provision, overall capacity of 110 places on a temporary basis whilst a long term, sustainable solution is agreed *taken from the SEND consultation document
Cavendish	11–19	Severe and Complex Learning Disability/Difficulty ASC/SLD/SLD/PMLD	90	Summer 2021 feasibility for a 2 classroom extension to be commissioned for use from September 2022, taking overall capacity to 110 places
Chesnut Lodge	2–16	SLD, PMLD	76	Additional classroom built in 2020 to meet existing need
The Grange	5-11	ASC		Additional resource base class funded for KS2 from Sept 2022
Simms Cross	5-11	ASC		Additional resource base places funded for KS1/KS2 from Sept 2022

3.2.8 Despite these developments, due to limited capital funding available from government, numbers of specialist provision has not kept at pace with increased demand, which has been magnified by impact of Covid too. This is reflected in the pressure for independent school places outside of the borough. Halton remains an outlier in its dependence on independent schools with 7.2% of pupils with an

EHCP in independent schools compared to 3.6% nationally. In numbers this represents over 110 pupils in independent schools as at the end of 2022 up from just 63 in 2019. Total spend on the independent sector is projected over 20% of Halton's overall Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Block this financial year.

- 3.2.9 In order to develop a more coordinated approach to meeting local need a new SEND Sufficiency Strategy is being consulted on over September. The Sufficiency Strategy will set out how the local authority will work with schools and other education providers to meet the needs of local children. The strategy will show projected growth in need over the next 4 years and how we will work with our schools and providers to meet those projections. The sufficiency work will be supported by the SEN Capital Grant announced at the end of March. The grant provides for £3.3m in capital funding to support the development of provision.
- 3.2.10 However the first steps have already been taken in ensuring that demand growth can be met. The Raise Academy for 11-16 year old children with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) is due to open in September 2023 and this will significantly reduce reliance on out of borough provision for those pupils. Over time the Raise academy will accommodate at least 25 pupils with SEMH who would otherwise be in the independent sector. Additional special free school applications are currently being sought for pupils with SEMH and ASC/communication needs in key stages 1 and 2.

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 **Children & Young People in Halton**

The purpose of the 2021-2025 Halton SEND Strategy is to improve outcomes for, and the lived experience of, children and young people with SEND and their families. Currently children recognised as having a special educational needs and/or disability make up over 17% of the areas school age population therefore the strategy will make a significant contribution towards ensuring that Halton's children and young people have the best possible start in life.

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

Young people with SEND and Learning difficulties are disproportionately likely to be NEET or unemployed. Elements of the strategy are aimed at improving employability and skills for these young people leading to meaningful employment.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Historical data and research shows that children and young people with SEND are disproportionately likely to be overweight, lack opportunities to access healthy lifestyles and leisure activities and die young. Improving health outcomes for these children and young people is a core objective of SEND Strategic Priority 3: Preparation for Adulthood.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

None identified.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None identified.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 Without a coherent and joined up strategic approach to meeting the needs and improving the life outcomes and lived experience of children and young people and their families it will be considerably more challenging for the local area to meet its statutory and morale duties. The SEND strategy and SEND sufficiency document are key documents that will identify and articulate how as a collective partnership education, health, social care and wider partners will support children and young people with SEND and their families to meet these morale and statutory duties effectively.

7.2 Individual objectives within the strategy will in some cases contain projects that may require separate risk analysis. Where this is the case these will be overseen by the SEND Strategic Partnership.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 Individual objectives within the strategy will in some cases contain projects that require separate and individual equality impact analysis and assessment as part of good practice. Where this is the case these will be overseen by the SEND Strategic Partnership.

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

None under the meaning of the Act.