

## 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, 12 June 2023 in the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn*

Present: Councillors Logan (Chair), Baker, Begg, Goodall, Jones, P. Lloyd Jones, McDermott, Rowe and Ryan

Apologies for Absence: Councillors C. Plumpton Walsh and Skinner

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: P. Murphy, J. Farrell, A. Jones and C. Finch

Also in attendance: None

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

		<i>Action</i>
CYP1	MINUTES	
	The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2023 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.	
CYP2	PUBLIC QUESTION TIME	
	It was confirmed that no public questions had been received.	
CYP3	EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES	
	The minutes relating to the Children and Young People Portfolio taken from Executive Board meetings held since the last meeting of this Board, were attached at Appendix 1 for information.	
CYP4	THE BIG CONVERSATION UPDATE	
	The Board received a report presenting the approach being taken to 'The Big Conversation', which was integral to formulating a new Council Corporate Plan, to take effect from April 2024.	
	Further to agreement at Executive Board in March,	

the Council would provide adequate opportunity for meaningful public consultation and ultimately produce a Corporate Plan, which was unique and meaningful to the people of Halton.

'The Big Conversation' was all about engaging with the public so that they understood the challenges the Council is facing. The approach being taken was between the Council and everyone who lived or worked in Halton, to work together in order to create an improved Borough in all aspects of everyday life. It was noted that feedback would be welcome in all formats; paper submissions, electronically or face to face, between now and the end of the year.

The report and accompanying presentation outlined the survey themes and questions, the process of data analysis and gave the timescales the project will take, up to the launching of the new Corporate Plan.

Following the presentation and Members' discussions and comments, the following was noted:

- The consultation would include the Council's workforce – it was noted that two thirds of the workforce lived in Halton;
- The survey was anonymous but responses will be monitored, to show where they were coming from – this would help to ensure an even representation, as areas that were under represented could be encouraged to take part;
- A good level of engagement will be identified by the Council's Central Intelligence Unit (CIU) who record the numbers of responses;
- Doubt was raised as to where schools, children's social services and SEND would be in the next 5 years so it was difficult to see how the five themes applied to these areas;
- Children and Young People would be invited to participate and a simplified version of the survey is available for them to complete;
- The Council was working with individual groups across Halton to ensure the survey was cascaded down to the people belonging to them;
- All schools will be included as part of the engagement process;
- It was thought that the five themes were aspirations;
- The wording of the themes would need to be clear to ensure they were understood by everyone;
- The five themes were taken from evidence based data from within the Council on the challenges the

Borough currently faced and comparisons with other LA's Corporate Plans across the Country; and

- The transformation is how we support each other to make the changes agreed in the communities and what we need to do to achieve these.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the report be noted; and
- 2) that the Children, Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board endorses the approach to facilitate 'The Big Conversation'.

Operational  
Director Policy,  
People,  
Performance and  
Efficiency

## CYP5 CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE UPDATE

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director – Children's Social Care, detailing the work undertaken to date in relation to the Children's Services Improvement Plan.

It was noted that Children's Services continued to operate under the auspices of a Notice of Improvement issued by the Department for Education (DfE) in January 2022 – this followed the Ofsted Focused Visit in October 2021. The Council is required, under the conditions of the Notice of Improvement, to have an Improvement Plan, whilst also operating with a Children's Improvement Board.

It was reported that the Improvement Plan was currently being reviewed to ensure that it was aligned with the findings from the most recent Ofsted Focused Visit completed in November 2022, along with the DfE 12-month review of the Improvement Notice that was reported to the Council in March 2023. It was noted that the findings from the latest Ofsted Focused Visit were reported to Members of the Board in January 2023.

The outcome of the DfE's 12-month review of the Children's Service Improvement Plan was reported on 14 March 2023; the report provided the main highlights from this. They set several priorities for the Council, which included workforce capacity and stability, partnership working, practice model and social work practice, and communication and engagement.

Members were advised that the Children's Services Improvement Plan was being refreshed to ensure it covered the latest findings and priorities as set out in the DfE review. The refreshed Plan and road map would be brought to the

next Board meeting.

The following information was provided in response to Members questions:

- The possibility of offering permanent employment to agency workers to offer them job security – this was an employee driven market due to demand exceeding the supply of qualified social workers, so they had many employment options to choose from;
- Social workers were generally a younger transient workforce – this was the case in the region and nationally;
- Recommendations on ways to retain staff had been made to central Government following the national review of Children's Social Care completed by Josh McAllister – for example tying in Council newly qualified social workers for 3 years;
- The 'Halton offer' for social workers was discussed – this was being improved and promoted to help with recruitment and retention of social workers;
- An improved employment offer was also important in such a highly competitive market – neighbouring authorities were also struggling with retention of staff;
- A local arrangement was suggested whereby social workers had to accept permanent employment with an authority if they worked there for a certain length of time;
- The Council was currently operating with a full complement of social workers, with vacancies being covered by agency staff;
- The 'Front Line Practice Unit' was a national apprenticeship programme by the Department for Education (DfE) starting in September and would offer one year training for 4 trainee social workers;
- An improvement in staff morale was identified by annual surveying and health assessments as well as feedback given to the Improvement Board;
- The need to have 'systematic social work practice' embedded throughout all areas of the service was recognised – this would also help with the reputation of Halton and be attractive to staff who were used to working under these principles; and
- The importance of partnership working was discussed, especially since the dissolution of the Safeguarding Board.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) note the current position on progress in relation to the

Executive Director  
Children's

requirements as set out by the Department for Education in the Notice of Improvement; and Services

- 2) supports the key priorities and actions outlined in the Children's Improvement Plan.

#### CYP6 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) SUFFICIENCY

The Board received a report on the progress to date on expanding the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision within Halton and the next steps, following receipt of a £3.3m capital allocation from the Department for Education (DfE).

It was reported that the DfE notified Halton it would be allocated £3.3m of capital funding to support the provision of new places or to expand existing provision for pupils and students with high needs. Officers then wrote to all schools to seek expressions of interest from them to offer new or additional SEND provision, based against need identified within the Local Authority. Out of nine expressions of interest received seven met the need identified and were agreed for progression and consideration to Executive Board; Appendix A listed the seven schools and the provision offer made by them.

It was noted that the Executive Board agreed to progress to statutory consultation for five schools where the SEND provision would be new; agreed to the expansion of provision at two further schools that already had existing SEND provision; and agreed to the progression of capital works at those two primary schools that already offered specialist provision and were not subject to statutory consultation. It was reported that approximately 100 additional SEND places would be made available through this new provision.

Members discussed the information presented regarding the expansion of SEND provision and queried whether 100 additional places would be enough. Discussions also took place on the following:

- The increasing pressures on SEND provision and the costs associated with this;
- The inclusivity of schools - not all children with an ECHP needed specialist provision and could stay in mainstream schools with support;
- Delays with the opening of Raise Academy, the Free School – the new opening date is June 2024 and

- regular meetings were being held with the DfE;
- The loss of the *English as an Additional Language* (EAL) service at a time when numbers requiring this type of support were increasing;
- The time limits of EHCP assessment, which was 20 weeks, however this was not being met currently for various reasons; and
- The EHCP ‘pre’ assessment and the reasons behind these – Senco staff provided support to parents and schools to help with the preparation of these, however staff shortages existed in the area since the pandemic.

RESOLVED: That the Board notes the information provided.

Executive Director  
Children's  
Services

CYP7 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT FOR QUARTER 3 OF 2022/23

The Board received the Performance Management reports for quarter 3 of 2022-23 (1 September 2022 to 31 December 2022).

The key priorities for development or improvement in 2022-23 were agreed by Members and included in the Local Authority’s Business Plan for the following Departments:

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

The reports detailed progress made against objectives, milestones and performance targets and provided information relating to key developments and emerging issues that had arisen during the period. Members were requested to consider the progress and performance information and highlight any areas of interest and/or concern, where further information could be reported at a future meeting of the Board.

The Chair informed the Board that he would be meeting with the Interim Director of Children’s Services to plan future agendas around the performance issues highlighted in the report.

From the information presented, issues relating to transformation costs, children in care, school exclusions, child exploitation, realism of performance measures and targets and benchmarking with neighbouring authorities were discussed.

In response to queries, it was reported that a new Family Hub service was being introduced, operating from buildings in Runcorn and Widnes and would offer services out in the community. Further information on the delivery of this would be sent following the meeting.

The expression '*edge of care*' was described generally as when a child is considered to be at risk of becoming a child in care. The focus is to maintain the child within their birth family where this is considered safe to do so.

RESOLVED: That the Performance Management reports for quarter 3 of 2022-23 be received.

Executive Director  
Children's  
Services

*Meeting ended at 8.25 p.m.*