

**ANNUAL REPORT CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES POLICY &
PERFORMANCE BOARD APRIL 2022 – March 2023**

Throughout the last municipal year, our staff across Children's services have risen to the challenges presented to them and demonstrated flexibility, creativity and resilience whilst supporting, protecting and educating our children and young people of Halton.

I would like to thank all of our staff for their dedication, hard work, and selflessness in dealing with the challenges that have arisen in supporting our children in care, our foster carers, our care leavers, and our children in schools. Finally, I would like to thank the Board for supporting me during this year and know that together we will ensure that the children and young people of Halton will be safe, healthy and gain a high-quality education that will prepare them to be caring, achieving, contributing citizens of the future.

Councillor Geoff Logan
Chair – Children, Young People & Families PPB

The following is a summary of topics scrutinised by the PPB during the cycle of its meetings. The usual September meeting was cancelled because of the death of HM Queen Elizabeth.

June 2022

The Board received a presentation, which gave an update of the work undertaken to date, following the Ofsted focused visit and the subsequent actions taken in response to their findings.

Halton received the focused visit to its Children's Services Department in October 2021 and inspectors looked at the arrangements for Children in Need (CIN), including those who were subject to a Child Protection Plan. Since the findings of the inspectors, steps had been taken to make improvements to the service, including the establishment of an Improvement Board.

The presentation outlined the progress made within leadership and management, areas of concern and the next steps to be taken; and progress made with the quality of practice, areas of concern and next steps to be taken. It also gave information on progress of quality assurance and performance and the activities carried out by the Operational Group.

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – People, which provided update in relation to the progress of the local area Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy 2021-25. The report also outlined some of the pressures on the SEND provision and support service. It gave the position in relation to applications for Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) assessments, in that these had continued to be received at a high rate since Covid restrictions were eased in Schools

over summer 2021, with 20% of applications being made by parents. Further, it was reported that the completion rate of applications to within 20 weeks had dropped to 62.5%; the report discussed the three factors contributing to this decline.

The Board was also presented with information on the following strategic developments:

- The Working Better Together sub-group of the SEND Partnership;
- The development of a Halton Co-production Charter;
- The DFE's Delivering Better Values Programme; and
- The development of a new SEND Sufficiency Strategy.

The key priorities for development or improvement in 2021-22 were agreed by Members and included in the Local Authority's Business Plan, for the relevant areas reported to the Board.

November 22

The Board received the Annual Report of the Headteacher of the Virtual School, which gave the education outcomes and achievements of Halton's Children in Care (CIC).

The Annual Report included detailed data, analysis and a summary of the work of Halton's Virtual School, during the academic year 2021-22. It was reported that the work of the school had continued throughout the academic year and the full Annual Report provided detailed analysis of how Halton's Children in Care had performed against each of the individual key performance indicators.

The Report also gave a summary of the Virtual School's progress towards its identified key priorities in 2022- 23.

The Board received a presentation from the Strategic Director – People, which provided an update of the work undertaken to date, following the Ofsted focussed visit and the subsequent actions taken in response to their findings.

Inspectors had looked at the arrangements for Children in Need, including those who were subject to a Child Protection Plan. Since then, steps had been taken to make improvements to the service, including the establishment of an Improvement Board. It was noted that Members received an initial update at the Board meeting on 13 June 2022.

The Board considered a report and presentation from the Strategic Director – People, advising on the progress and updates in relation to the Halton Local Area SEND Strategy 2021-25 and current pressures. Members were advised that throughout 2021-22 Halton, in common with other local authority areas, had 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 2022. This represented a 35% increase in demand, presented in the table in paragraph 3.1.2. The report outlined the impacts that the increased demand was making across the service. Considerable pressure was being placed on the capacity in both the SEN Assessment Team and those services that

provided advice and assessments that contributed towards developing EHCP's, such as the Educational Psychology Service, Speech and Language Therapy Services, Occupational and Physiotherapy services.

It was reported that these capacity issues had resulted in a decline in the completion rate for EHCP's, which was due to three main factors; these were described in the report. Further, Members were advised that the growth in demand for EHCP's was placing huge stress on the availability of specialist provision in Halton. Paragraph 3.2.7 gave details of capital developments that had been put in place over the last 3 years to help accommodate the increase in the numbers and complexities of pupils with SEND, as all specialist places and resource bases were oversubscribed for 2022.

The report made comparisons on the current pressures with national data and neighbouring authorities; gave information on funding / grants being made available; and presented information on the new SEND Sufficiency Strategy currently being consulted upon.

The Board received an update on the Supporting Families Programme and its current performance levels.

It was reported that following the Spending Review in October 2021, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) announced an extra £200m boost to the Supporting Families Programme, which would now continue for the next 3 years (2022-2025) and allow the Programme to be expanded. The report outlined the improvements being made to the Programme by the DLUHC in order to achieve this.

It was noted that Halton signed up to the Programme commitments and funding agreement in April 2022, which included key parameters around performance requirements, resourcing the Programme, and service and data transformation. These were outlined in the report and a detailed update on all aspects of the Programme in Halton was provided as well as a performance update.

The Board considered a report which provided a summary of the 2022 provisional un-validated attainment outcomes for Halton's Children and Young People.

The data presented included a summary of Early Years Good Level of Development (GLD) indicator; Key Stage One phonics results; and Key Stages 1, 2, 4 and 5 attainment information. This data provided the Board with an early indication of the educational attainment data across Halton's Schools before publication of the validated data by the Department for Education (DfE) in December. The DfE publication would include detailed national data on progress and provide comparative groups. Members were advised however, that the data provided in this report gave sufficient information for the Local Authority, schools and wider stakeholders to plan and prioritise actions.

The report also shared with the Board some key updates regarding educational priorities and developments both locally and nationally:

- Priority Educational Investment Area (PEIA) – of which Halton is one;
- Halton Learning Alliance – to be formally relaunched;
- Delivering Better Values Programme – of which Halton was part; and
- Early Years Experts and Mentors Programme – Halton participating.

January 2023

The Board received a presentation on the outcome of the Ofsted focussed visit which took place on 23 and 24 November 2022 and the subsequent actions taken in response to their findings.

Members were advised that the focus of the visit was the Council's first response in dealing with contacts and referrals to Children's Social Care and Early Help, including the strategy discussion / S27 process. Inspectors also took the opportunity to review the arrangements for managing allegations against professionals under the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) process and considered the recommendations from previous inspections, most notably the areas for priority action from the last focussed visit in October 2021. Officers presented the key headlines from the visit and reported that there were no 'areas for priority action' identified, so no serious weaknesses existed in the quality of practice. The next steps were also outlined and discussed and it was noted that any areas for development were now incorporated into the Improvement and Transformation programme.

The Board considered a report and received a presentation, which summarised key work taking place locally and at a regional level to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

The presentation gave an overview of work taking place in Halton by a variety of organisations and teams such as: Halton Borough Council; Halton Public Health; NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Halton Place (Integrated Care Board [ICB] formally CCGs); and NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Systems (ICS).

Preventative work was carried out by these organisations that aimed to keep children and young people mentally well. The report and presentation described core and statutory services that were available to provide direct interventions and support when children and young people were struggling.

The Board received the Sufficiency Duty Report for 2022-23 (previously known as the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Review) CSA.

It was noted that Sections 6 and 7 of *The Childcare Act (2006)* and the associated statutory guidance: *Early Education and Childcare – Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (March 2018)*, requires all local authorities in England to undertake and provide an annual childcare sufficiency report to elected Council Members, on how they were meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare and to make it available to the public.

The report detailed achievements since the last review and outlined Halton's current position for Members. It also highlighted any gaps in provision and how these were

being addressed. The report shared the longer-term effects of how Covid-19 had affected the childcare sector. Despite the impact of Covid-19, the childcare market in Halton continued to be secure and sustainable, although there were some concerns amongst providers regarding the future with the rising cost of living.

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director of Children's Services, which presented the Annual Report for comments, complaints and compliments, relating to Children's Social Care Services from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

Publication of the Annual Report was a statutory requirement, which provided an analysis on complaints processed under the Children Act 1989 Representation's Procedure and evidenced how feedback from service users had been used to improve service delivery.

The Report also provided Members with compliments made by clients and positive feedback from workers/professionals relating to Children's Services in the People Directorate. The report also demonstrated the positive impact and outcomes on the lives of people accessing services in this Directorate.

As part of its overview, the Policy and Performance Board also considers the Council's Executive Board minutes and Children's Trust minutes as well as the Quarterly Performance Monitoring Reports.
