

**ANNUAL REPORT CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES  
POLICY & PERFORMANCE BOARD  
April 2023 – March 2024**

Children's services in Halton are undergoing a period of change and improvement. This is being led by a new leadership team who have quickly identified areas for improvement, strategies for this improvement and the operational necessities underpinning the strategies.

A topic group composed of members of the PPB has been meeting with the leadership team to scrutinise every aspect of the plan. Whilst this work was ongoing an ILACS report was published. The contents of this report were very disappointing.

However, within the report the inspectors noted that plans were in place to make the improvements necessary to ensure that we will be fulfilling our responsibilities to children, families and young people in the borough.

The PPB will continue to scrutinise existing plans and any plan that follows from the findings of the inspection report. The PPB has every confidence in the members of the new leadership team and the plans underpinning their work.

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

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The following is a summary of topics scrutinised by the PPB during the cycle of its meetings. The focus has been around the stability of senior leadership, securing a permanent workforce and the action taken following both the Local Area SEND Inspection and the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services. Regular updates were also provided on the creation of the new Corporate Plan.

### **June 2023**

The Board received a presentation, on the approach being taken to 'The Big Conversation' which would underpin the formulation of a new corporate plan.

Clarity was sought on the engagement of Children and Young People in the formation of the plan and assurances were given on schools being integral to the 'conversation'.

A report was presented by the Operational Director for Children's Social Care detailing the work undertaken to date in relation to the Children's Services Improvement Plan, which was being refreshed to reflect latest findings. A priority relating to securing a more stable, permanent workforce was agreed.

The Board considered a report on the expansion of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision through the creation of new Resource Base Provision, as well as the development of a new SEMH free school, due to open in September 2024. Challenge was given around the number of places which this would provide, but clarity and assurances were provided on the other steps being taken alongside school leaders.

### **September 2023**

The board welcomed representatives from Halton Carer's Centre who provided a presentation and updates on the work of the centre and the impact it has on families. The board expressed concern for young carers welfare, those who are not identified as well as the high proportion of unpaid carers, and challenged leaders to ensure that action was taken to work with schools and wider services in resolving some of the areas identified.

An update was given on the leadership in Children's Services and the substantive appointments being made. The 12 week plan was shared and the action taken to date.

The unvalidated attainment outcomes for Halton's schools was provided,— with questions asked relating to foreign languages at GCSE, and the provision in borough for Post 16. The board received an update on the work on the Priority Education Investment Area and the proposals for the Delviering Better Value Grant.

### **November 2023**

The Board received the Annual Report of the Headteacher of the Virtual School, which provided the educational outcomes and achievements of Halton's Children in Care (CIC), the impact of the work of the Virtual School and the key areas of focus for the 23/24 academic year.

The Board received a presentation from the Chief Executive's Delivery Unit on the 'Big Conversation' and the responses received to date. Challenge was given on the how all areas of the borough were being engaged with to ensure an accurate picture was formed and concerns raised on the importance of not raising expectations when prioritising the use of limited funding.

The Board received the Sufficiency Duty Report for 2023-24.

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, particularly with the expansion of free childcare from April 2024.

## **January 2023**

The Board received a presentation on the findings of the 'Big Conversation' and the publication of the Corporate Plan. A focus was placed on the engagement of young people and the percentage of respondents in the 16-19 year old category.

The Board considered a report and received a presentation, which summarised the key work taking place locally and at a regional level to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. The board noted and celebrated the work of the educational psychology service in Halton.

A report was presented on the work of the Family Hubs. The national context was shared alongside the work within Halton. Members, overall, were pleased to hear the success of the hubs and expressed an interest in further updates on the impact for families in the following cycle.

Following the validation of educational outcomes, a report was provided on the key performance measures. Questions were discussed around the cuts to Local Authority funding to support schools, and actions taken to engage Governors in the changes.

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

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