

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

**DATE:** 9 June 2025

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Executive Director of Children's Services

**PORTFOLIO:** Children, Young People and Families

**SUBJECT:** Residential and Supported Accommodation Sufficiency Update

**WARD(S)** All Wards

### **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 This covering report provides an updated position around the Residential and Supported Accommodation Sufficiency programme of work which also incorporates A7 within the Improvement Plan. A presentation will be shared at the meeting.

### **2.0 RECOMMENDED: That**

- 1) the report and attached presentation be noted; and**
- 2) the Board offers comment and direction on progress to date.**

### **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 3.1 A supporting presentation is also provided to appraise members of the Residential and Supported Accommodation Sufficiency programme and its progress.
- 3.2 Within the wider Childrens Sufficiency Improvement Journey the following are of note:
- A full restructure of the Commissioning Team is complete which will allow for the continued Contract Management of the revised Contract Register, through the developing Performance Framework. A refreshed Contracts Register is now in place and contracts are now RAG rated in terms of renewal timeframes and provider compliance and performance. The Contract monitoring arrangements are now embedded within the completed Children and Young Peoples Quality and Performance Monitoring Framework (QPMF). The Contracts Register is now supported by a dedicated commissioning workplan, which is shared with Procurement colleagues

- The placement team has received additional officers within the establishment, and roles have been clarified within new and updated job profiles to allow for autonomy and more focused working practices. This has facilitated link worker/point of contact roles to provider cohorts of IFA, Residential and Supported Accommodation Providers. Meetings have been held with providers who have attempted to serve notice/terminate placements, and immediate notice has been avoided. Additional support has been implemented to stabilise placements, which has avoided notice, termination and potential unnecessary moves to additional (high cost) placements. We will imminently strengthen our Individual Placement Agreements to enforce the need for pre-emptive Stability Meetings.
- We have strengthened relationships with Procurement colleagues and have shared workplans to ensure continuity of compliance with regulation and standing orders.
- Commissioning receive a weekly overview of all planning applications in the borough and consult on those involving children's settings. Providers are now actively encouraged to engage with Commissioning prior to any planning application to understand priorities. To date, Commissioning have supported 4 applications, and successfully challenged 4 applications in the local area, meaning that only good providers operate in Halton. The next development is to work with Planning Committee Elected Members to consider the concerns raised by Childrens Services are equal to material considerations, whilst respecting planning laws and conventions.
- The Supported Accommodation Block Contract renewed for 12 months with a view to future expansion through the development of the two Care Leavers Foyers across the borough, within the contract.
- Service Level Agreement with Juno has been approved within the wider Sufficiency Strategy for four children's homes and the finer details are being jointly agreed across the partnership arrangement. There is a detailed project plan which incorporates all elements of the individual developments, providing a holistic overview of the programme as a whole.
- The Children and Young Peoples Quality Performance and Monitoring Framework (QPMF) is complete and has been shared with operational leads and Directors. Dedicated forms have been adapted, amended and developed to respond to scheduled visits and "emergency" QA requirements. This will be shared with providers during Provider Forums.

- We are now part of the North West regional QA group and are taking a regional stance on uplifts. A review of internal processes is complete, and a combined Placement Request and AA form is in place. The referrals process has been streamlined and a uniform route identified via the combined PR and AA document. Work has been completed within Eclipse around anonymity and confidentiality. Regional consultation with providers around issues and concerns has been listened to and social workers have been encouraged to attend the regional training with the full support of operational team managers and service leaders.
- We are engaging PNW to be involved in changes to the Regional Frameworks, to ensure that Halton are integral to sub-regional engagement with providers. We will proactively engage LCR to uniformly support realistic fee uplift requests in November every year. All fee uplifts will be considered in relation to outcomes for children and young people.
- High-cost placement tracker implemented in April 2024. Tracking and monitoring of High-cost placements and whether they are meeting the needs of children takes place monthly. There has been an annual cost avoidance of just over £1,000,000 due to activity within this group.

Through the above developments, we are seeing positive improvement and successes in:

- The quality assurance checks on providers is improving the safety of children in residential provisions by increasing the scrutiny of care afforded to them.
- Services have a better understanding of the needs in the borough and actively developing services that meet our childrens needs.
- Relationships with the planning team have seen appropriate challenge to applications of care homes being built in the area that do not prioritise our children and do not provide good care.
- Regional approach to uplifts by providers means that we can work together in the North West to regulate the cost of placements for children.
- Engagement with Juno who will reinvest profits into our early help model focusing on future needs of children. Keeping them home safely with families

#### 4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The programme supports the Children and Young Peoples Plan, in its entirety.

## 5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are evidenced financial savings and cost avoidance which are possible and being achieved within both the Residential and Supported Accommodation programme and the satellite actions detailed above within A7 of the Improvement Plan.
- 5.2 As described within the slide deck, there are potential long-term savings in the partnership agreement with JUNO. The priority in borough placements, at a reasonable fixed rate, will progressively avoid external or out of borough placements as each home comes online. The mixed asset ownership allows for lower placement fees due to low rental arrangements and the sharing of resources.
- 5.3 The internal configuration of existing council-owned assets means that effective collaboration with Asset Management, Regeneration and Planning, has resulted in new funding streams being accessible and reducing capital spend wherever possible.

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

### 6.1 **Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**

The programme has dedicated focus' in all areas under the Children's Home (England) and Supported Accommodation Regulations, and the renewed service specifications and Partnership Agreement will be defined and triangulated around these.

### 6.2 **Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy**

The service is significantly beneficial in terms of finance, per placement. It also keeps young people close to home, with a view to encourage both local residents and care leavers into local care-related employment opportunities in the new services.

### 6.3 **Supporting Children, Young People and Families**

This area is self-defined in the Partnership Agreement and various service specifications and within the ethos of the service being delivered.

### 6.4 **Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need**

Our Children in Care and Care Leavers are some of the most vulnerable residents and the service is dedicated to inclusive support which is focused on building resilience and independence, moving young people away from disadvantage, and promoting their success.

### 6.5 **Working Towards a Greener Future**

The whole programme revolves around collaboration with Housing and Regeneration to incorporate all current strategies, redevelopment of

existing and unused assets, and future developments. All Children's Homes and Supported Accommodation provisions will be project managed collaboratively and will strive to be environmentally friendly.

**6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

The programme strives to develop local provision for local children, and build resilience within the community.

**7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 In terms of risk, there is a low potential for the Partnership Agreement to develop in line with central government initiatives and financial developments. Fees set in 2025 may not be applicable in future years due to international events and national changes in budgets.

7.2 To mitigate this, we have incorporated an annual review to discuss and agree any variations which may be requested.

**8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.2 Equality and Diversity are at the heart of the Partnership Agreement and in the specifications for each provision. These principles are also reinforced by national legislation, the regulatory body (Ofsted), and the Quality Standards.

The proposed provisions are also considered in terms of equity across the borough. We have strived to position the proposed developments in consideration of the Merseyflow Bridge and young people's preferred preferences in terms of where they live, are educated and choose to be employed.

**9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 The whole programme revolves around collaboration with Housing and Regeneration to incorporate all current strategies, redevelopment of existing and unused assets, and future developments.

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

10.1 **'None under the meaning of the Act.'**