

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: Agency Staffing and Court Costs

WARD(S) Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 For the Board to scrutinise progress being made in the reduction of agency staffing and court costs

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That the report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Improvements in the quality of assessments, plans and planning is supporting a reduction in the number of applications being made to the courts. The LA has made progress in concluding the number of children already in court with a reduction from 130 in Feb 2024 to 70 in March 2025. Of the new applications presented to court only 8 of those children have had an interim care order granted with direction that the children remain in the home. This is a reduction and implies that the quality of assessments has improved.

3.2 Public Law Outline has also been improved. More families are considered through the PLO process prior to applications being made to court. There has been a 50% increase in the number of families that has benefited from PLO since December 2023. This increase is having a positive impact on the timeliness of concluding court cases were the risks could not be reduced. Our average timeliness of hearings was 80 Weeks in April 2024 and is now at 33 weeks as of March 2025 (the concluding of longer term cases impacts n the timeliness as this measure is taken based on the length of time it has taken to conclude.) The current average time to conclude is between 29 weeks and 32 weeks.

3.3 Number of children coming in to care is down from 44.0 – 39.0. with over 400 in care last year we have seen this drop to 355 this year. Whilst there remains fluctuations there is a downward trajectory.

- 3.4 Agency numbers continue to reduce with 'in addition to establishment' posts significantly reduced as exit strategies and joint working with Finance, HR and the senior managers demonstrating effective in addressing this previous culture.
- 3.5 Agency rates have reduced from 63% to 36% and the number of applicants has increased. Agency workers are starting to convert particularly in the Child In Need teams and Children in Care.
- 3.6 The agency rates continue on a downward trajectory.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 No Implications

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The work in PLO has mitigated costs of £19,656,000 if all those children had come into residential care in an average costed placement of 7K per week. For those children already in care, in the last 6 months, 19 have a plan of Special Guardianship Order /Child Arrangement Order. A further 53 children have a care plan of return to family in the last 6 months. We continue to look at the discharges of children from care where the legal order is not longer required and where it is safe to do so.

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

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

Were safe to do so the legal responsibility for children in care returning to family and discharged from our care promotes the child's wellbeing.

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

No Impact.

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

Were safe to do so the legal responsibility for children in care returning to family and discharged from our care promotes the child's wellbeing.

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

Were safe to do so the legal responsibility for children in care returning to family and discharged from our care promotes the child's wellbeing.

6.5 **Working Towards a Greener Future**

No Impact

6.6 **Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**
No Impact.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 Childrens social care continue to work towards reducing the cost of staffing and care. The targets set in terms of savings can in some instances be impacted upon by the rising costs of care within residential and private fostering companies. Our continued focus on offering the right care to families to mitigate the needs of intervention continue to be a priority and in the longer term will support the reduction in council spends.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 No impact.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 Reduction in children coming into care will support greener agenda as will reduce carbon emissions through travel for family time.

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

‘None under the meaning of the Act.’