



# DfE Commissioner Report Recommendations Progress March 2025



## Summary

- An update on progress made by March 2025 has been provided in the slides that follow.
- Each action has been RAG rated to look at progress and likelihood of achieving in line with the timescales set out.
- 21% recommendations have been completed (5)
- 71% of the recommendations are in progress and on track to be achieved in timescale (17)
- Two actions are in progress, but have been delayed.

### Key

Completed

In progress and on track to be achieved in timescale

In progress but some delays

Not in progress or challenge in meeting the timescales

- The evidence from the recent monitoring visit suggests some further work to be undertaken to get consistency in practice for strategy discussions
- Action planning for Corporate Parenting Board in progress but unclear if it will be completed prior to the April CPB

# Children's Services

*Seen, Heard, Safe & Supported.*

Recommendation	Lead	Progress – March 2025	Status
1. Within the next six months, Halton Borough Council should review their governance arrangements for Policy & Performance Boards to ensure that they are consistent with statutory guidance issued by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities	John Morrissy	<p>Proposal developed for review of Scrutiny arrangements across Halton, based on revised DLUHC guidance, and the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny SIR (scrutiny improvement review) methodology. This will include reviewing the following areas and agreeing an action plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A self-assessment of our current practice against the key cultural elements listed in paragraph 12 of the DLUHC guidance</li><li>• Our training and development offer in relation to scrutiny, including our induction offer for new members of the council, and for those new to PPBs; and how we support scrutiny members in having an independent mindset and feeling empowered to challenge &amp; probe</li><li>• Our structure and officer resource for supporting scrutiny</li><li>• How we communicate the role of scrutiny to the public</li><li>• Our arrangements for identifying, recruiting and supporting co-opted members and technical advisers</li></ul> <p>This review to be undertaken in Q1 (April – June 2025).</p>	In progress & On track



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Recommendation	Lead	Progress – March 2025	Status
2. The Executive Director of Children's Services should routinely attend the Children Young People & Families Policy and Performance Board	Zoe Fearon	Children's Services Executive Director attends all PPB meetings	Completed
3. The Council should work with local partners to consider the impact and learning of the Priority Area Programme and develop sustainable plans beyond the end of the programme.	Ben Holmes	Education Strategy 2030 is progressing and on track for a summer 2025 launch. Vision and Priority Setting session delivered in March 2025 with 50+ Headteachers and Partners, facilitated by Prof Janet Lord and DfE Advisor, Nick King, alongside Ben Holmes. Further consultation with Parents, YP and Professionals to be scheduled across the summer term.	In progress & On track
4. The Halton Improvement Board for Services to Children should receive bimonthly reports from the SEND Improvement Board and on the DBV programme to strengthen support and challenge	Ben Holmes	This is in place with the first report presented at February 2025 Improvement Board and on forward plan to report to every other meeting. Programme Management Improvement Leads for SEND and CSC to coordinate reporting to the Boards with consistent approach.	Completed



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5. The authority should work with the DfE Improvement Advisor and their Improvement Partner to identify an appropriate practice model to then be implemented across Children's Services in the next 12 months. It should then be an ongoing priority to consistently embed this model across children's services.	Katherine Appleton, Wendy Harrison, Val Armor & Zoe Fearon	Trauma Informed & Systemic Practice training has been rolled out with Motivational Interviewing next to be rolled out which will form our practice model. Conversations underway to look at response to Families First with strategic lead identified which will support both recommendations 5 and 11 Exploration of Family Safeguarding model is underway with data analysis in progress via Hertfordshire Consideration of SLIP support is underway.	In progress & On track
6. The Council should ensure that processes enable social care posts to be advertised without delay and safe recruitment processes enable prompt commencement.	Hayley Hamlett	Systems are in place and additional resourcing officer based in SW Academy to progress social care posts quickly. All recruitment activity is reported to Workforce Board and governance through the Improvement Board. Performance in February evidenced reduction in total time to hire by 20.41 working days from Q2-Q3 and the average number of days completing pre-employment checks for all roles in Children's Social Care reduced by 13.59 working days  Linked to Area 11 on the Improvement Plan	Completed



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7. Systems are in place and additional resourcing officer based in SW Academy to progress social care posts quickly. All recruitment activity is reported to Workforce Board and governance through the Improvement Board. Linked to Area 11 on the Improvement Plan	Wendy Harrison	Reporting in place from the SW Academy to both Workforce Board and Improvement Board. Linked to Area 11 on the Improvement Plan	Completed
8. The Council should reduce its use of agency social workers to at least the national average within two years of the publication of this report.	Wendy Harrison	This is in progress and reduced from 68% to 36% in the last 12 months. Plans in place to further reduce the use of agency workers. Recruitment & Retention Strategy and Workforce Strategy now in place. This is monitored at the Workforce Board and reporting in place to the Improvement Board. Linked to Improvement plan areas A6 & A11	In progress & On track



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9. The Executive Director must play a leadership role in driving the strategic agenda for Children's Services and the wider partnership. She should agree a set of clear strategic objectives with staff and partners, with clear actions and ambitious timescales for their delivery.	Zoe Fearon	<p>Children and Young People's Plan co-produced with partners and key stakeholders setting out ambitions and strategic plans to drive improvements for CYP in Halton launched in November 2024.</p> <p>Strategies to support the delivery are in development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• SEND Strategy</li><li>• Education Strategy</li><li>• AP Strategy</li><li>• Reducing Children in Care strategy</li></ul> <p>The next Corporate Parenting Strategy to be co-produced over the next six months</p> <p>HSCP developed the Business Plan following the priority setting session where three priorities were agreed (Neglect, Domestic Abuse, Complex Safeguarding)</p>	Completed





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10. Senior Leaders in Children's Services should hold monthly or bimonthly whole service management meetings that bring together managers from social care and early help and prevention services.	Katherine Appleton	Monthly meetings set up (Aiming High) which covers all managers from social care and early help and prevention services. Twice yearly meetings for full Children's Services cohort (first meeting held, next meeting being set up). Additional Leadership & Management training offer being explored for Children's Services managers as part of an ongoing induction programme.	In progress & On track
11. Working with the DfE Improvement Advisor, within the next six months, Senior Leaders in Children's Services should review whether they should implement a locality practice model linked to the Family Hubs in order to bring teams closer to local communities and support more integrated working across teams.	As per Recommendation 5		In progress & On track





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12. Within the next six months Halton Borough Council should set out its ambition for children and young people in a way that raises the profile and importance of children and young people. Consideration should be given to using an approach similar to becoming a 'Child Friendly Authority' to create a recognised 'brand' for all activity focused on children and young people and to support the engagement of partners, business and communities.	Corporate Management Team	Discussions have started with Corporate Management Team (CMT) Session planned (April 2025) with Stuart Smith to support CMT in developing their approach and response	In progress & On track
13. In the next three months, the Council should review its internal processes, particularly in relation to finance and HR to ensure that they do not cause significant or unnecessary delay to improvement and efficiencies.	Stephen Baker & Hayley Hamlett	HR and finance routinely represented at Joint Children's Services DMT to report on progress and respond to any challenges. Transformation Delivery Unit are undertaking process mapping to support identification of any efficiencies and improvements.	In progress & On track



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Recommendation	Lead	Progress – March 2025	Status
14. The local authority should consult with the Local Government Association regarding the training that should be provided to members of the Children, Young People & Families Policy and Performance Board. Training should be provided to Board annually to support them in their role.	Ben Holmes & John Morrissy	Training has been offered from Local Government Association. Dates to be agreed. The proposed scrutiny review and action plan will include training and support for all members; but in the short terms we will support Children's PPB members with guides and materials including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• LGA Councillor workbook on Scrutiny</li><li>• Centre for Governance and Scrutiny Guide to scrutiny of Children's Services</li></ul>	In progress & On track



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15. The Children Young People & Families Policy and Performance Board should ensure that the Board has access to expert to advice through the use of coopted members.	John Morrissy	<p>The proposed scrutiny review and action plan (April – June 2025) will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Producing guidance for scrutiny / PPB chairs regarding co-opted members and technical advisers</li><li>• Developing training and support for co-opted members and technical advisers</li><li>• Agreeing how will we identify and recruit them</li><li>• Established a clear budget and process for procuring this support, which is communicated to PPB Chairs</li></ul> <p>In the short term, we will support the Children's PPB by notifying the chair of the existing arrangements for co-option and providing suggested names for individuals who may be useful co-optees.</p>	In progress & On track



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16. The Children, Young People & Families Policy and Performance Board should undertake at least two Board inquiries a year. The findings of these enquiries, along with the DCS response, should be presented to Executive Board and copied to the Halton Improvement Board for Services to Children.	John Morrissy	<p>Deep dive undertaken and presented to PPB in Q4 2024-25. The theme was in relation to Finances.</p> <p>The proposed scrutiny review and action plan (April – June 2025) will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Align process and practice for Board Inquiries / Evidence Sessions / Deep Dives across all PPBs;</li><li>• Identify any necessary training and support for members and officers involved in these sessions</li><li>• Clarify how recommendations from these sessions will be reported to Exec Board</li></ul>	In progress & On track



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17. In the next six months, the Council should develop a single Corporate Parenting action plan with clear actions to be delivered. This plan should at least bring together existing actions, as well as the recommendations from the National Adviser for Care Leavers. The plan and progress against the plan should be reported to the Executive Board, Corporate Management Team and Halton Improvement Board for Services to Children.	Jamie Pope	<p>Action plan in development and will be presented to Corporate Parenting Board in April, CMT April, Executive Board in May.</p> <p>The recommendations from the National Adviser and Improvement Plan have been combined and will be submitted to the Improvement Board in March 2025 with progress and impact report. Linked to Improvement Plan Area 1</p>	In progress, some delays



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18. Now that the Corporate Senior Leadership Team are aware of the range of challenges facing Children's Services, they should work with the Director of Children's Services to produce a plan that sets out how each Directorate will support Children's Services to improve. Plans should at least include actions to: safely and appropriately reducing the number of children entering care; reduce the impact of poverty on children; ensure that children and young people are accessing their entitlement to education; the recruitment and retention of foster carers; the recruitment and retention of social workers; increase the number of care leavers in education employment and training; increase the number of care leavers in suitable accommodation.		As per Recommendation 12	In progress & On track



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Recommendation	Lead	Progress – March 2025	Status
19. The HSCP should work with the Independent Scrutineer to monitor progress and impact on practice and outcomes of the Business Plan on a quarterly basis	Susanne Leece & Anna Berry	Reporting in place and being completed through the workplan of the Independent Scrutineer. Reported in the February 2025 Improvement Board report from the HSCP Business Manager.	In progress & On track
20. The Independent Scrutineer should provide a report on the impact of their work to the Halton Improvement Board for Services to Children at least twice a year.	Susanne Leece & Anna Berry	Planned to align with Annual report for the HSCP, with a further update mid-year.	In progress & On track
21. The HSCP should produce a clear plan to ensure that: - Strategy discussions in Halton take place within the timescales set out in Working Together 2023 - Strategy discussions are attended by the key partners involved with the child/young person and if, in exceptional circumstances, this is not possible, the agency provides information to support decision-making	Susanne Leece & Katherine Appleton	Practice guidance updated and launched Training delivered Multi-agency meeting in place to scrutinise practice and performance Strategic meeting held to agree additional resources to commence in April 2025. Reporting in place for the Improvement Board – latest data for Improvement Board showed 100% attendance from all partners at strategy meetings Linked to A1 & A2 on Improvement Plan	In progress – some delays





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<p>22. The HSCP should produce a monthly report that sets out</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- the number of strategy discussions held each month;</li><li>- the number held within timescales set out in Working Together 2023; and</li><li>- the number of key partners (health, education including early years where relevant, police and children's social care) that attended each meeting.</li></ul> <p>This report should be sent to the three lead safeguarding partners as designated in Working Together 2023, as well as the Independent Scrutineer and the Department for Education Improvement Advisor.</p>	Gray Prince	<p>Performance information provided monthly as part of the Improvement Board Vital Signs report.</p> <p>Reporting through HSCP to begin in March using the Strategy meeting multiagency scrutiny group to receive the performance information and feed learning and actions to the Strategic Safeguarding Partnership meeting and the Safeguarding Executive Group.</p> <p>Linked to A1 and A2 in the Improvement Plan.</p>	In progress & On track



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<p>23. The HSCP should undertake quarterly audits of a sample of section 47 investigations to ensure that they are robust, and in particular, that;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- they result in a robust plan that addresses the child protection concerns identified</li> <li>- children are seen during the enquiries, and where appropriate to their age, seen alone and that this is clearly recorded on the child's record.</li> </ul>	Gray Prince & Susanne Leece	<p>S47 audit was undertaken in November 2024.</p> <p>The HSCP QA Framework identifies quarterly audit activity. Proposal is that all thematic audits will look at the S47 investigations to approach this, in addition to the standalone audits undertaken around S47.</p> <p>Neglect is the theme for the audit undertaken in Q4 2024-25, learning is currently being collated.</p> <p>HSCP QA post has been agreed to better support the HSCP to undertake more coordinated multiagency activity.</p>	In progress & On track
<p>24. To support the Halton Improvement Board for Services to Children to take a more strategic focus, within the next nine months, the Board should hold three 'Turning the Curve' events on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Safely and appropriately reducing the need for children to enter care</li> <li>- Reducing the impact of poverty on children and young people</li> <li>- Improving school attendance</li> </ul>	Gray Prince & Susanne Leece & Ben Holmes	<p>Poverty &amp; Neglect workshop held in November 2024</p> <p>Safely keeping children at home workshop held in February 2025</p> <p>Improving School Attendance event being prepared for Summer Term 2025 – Impact to be monitored via Vulnerable Learners Partnership Board.</p> <p>Next steps are to close the loop on the learning from the events and bring this back</p>	In progress & On track

