

REPORT TO: Schools Forum

DATE: 11th June 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Director of Education, Inclusion and Provision

PORTFOLIO: Children, Young People & Families

SUBJECT: Speech and Language Service Update

WARDS: Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update of the current position of the Speech and Language (SLT) service by Communicate -SLT CIC the commissioned service for Halton Council (HBC) and NHS Cheshire and Merseyside.
- 1.2 To provide an update on current activity with the five independent speech and language providers.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 A tender process took place in 2023 for the children and young people's Speech and Language Therapy contract. The contract was awarded to a new provider, Communicate-SLT CIC in October 2023. The service is jointly commissioned with NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, with HBC holding the contract.
- 2.2 HBC and ICB commissioners agreed that the service should prioritise key areas of provision based upon the clinical risk to children and young people and statutory responsibilities. These comprise of:
 - Children and young people requiring an assessment or review during the EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan) process
 - Children and young people on the neurodevelopmental pathway.
 - Children and young people with dysphasia (swallowing difficulties).
- 2.3 There have been several challenges for the current commission as the demand for speech and language service has exceeded capacity. This is largely due to four key areas; delays in recruitment of specialist speech and language therapists, this is a national challenge. Inherited waiting list from previous provider, data transfer from previous provider and then subsequently understanding the case load.
- 2.4 The impact has been an increase in some service waiting times and a number of informal and formal complaints relating to the waiting times for assessments and interventions. The service was requested to prioritise children and young people

with the highest clinical need, the impact has therefore been higher for some elements of the service than others.

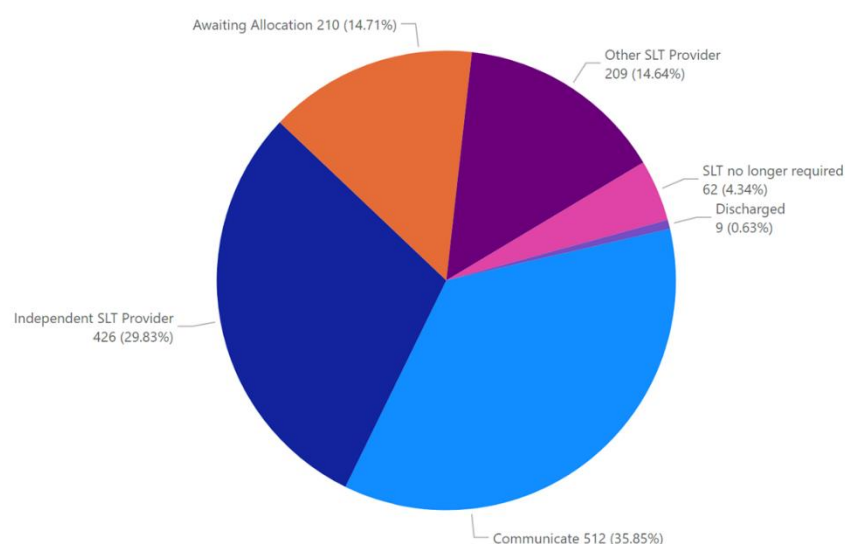
3.0 CURRENT EHCP ACTIVITY



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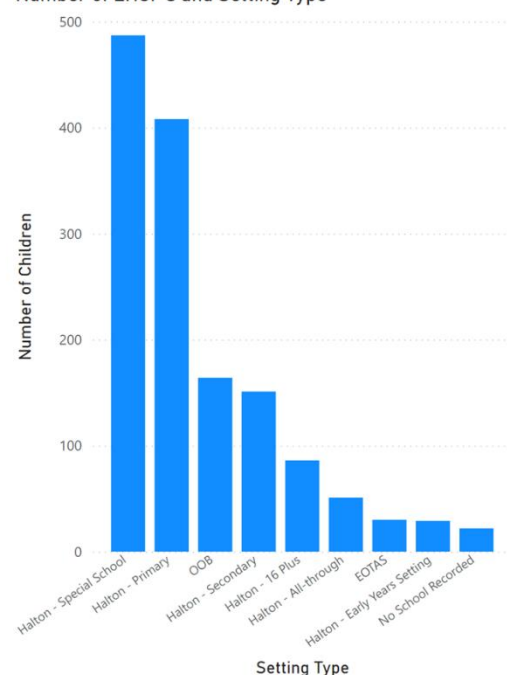
Number of EHCP's in cohort

EHCP SLT Provider Allocations



SLT Provider ● Communicate ● Independent SLT Provi... ● Awaiting Allocation ● Other SLT Provider ● SLT no longer re... ● Discharged

Number of EHCP's and Setting Type



- 3.1 At the end of April 2025 the figures showed 1777 EHCPs of which 1128 (64%) had an identified primary or secondary need of either Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) and/ or Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). A further 101 are undergoing assessment with 39 with SLCN or ASC.
- 3.2 The above shows the current picture of EHCPs with ASC and/or SLCN as the primary and secondary needs by setting. However, Communicate CIC includes children with other identified needs. The cohort that is awaiting allocating includes 91 children that are accessing post 16 provision, 77 at Riverside College and a number of new EHCPs. These cohorts are currently being reviewed to see if and what support is required.
- 3.3 From January 2025, the use of additional High Needs Block funding, has enabled the local authority to work in partnership to strengthen support for pupils with SEND. HBC secured five additional independent Speech and Language providers to focus on reviewing children with SLCN needs and producing care plans to support their EHCP.
- 3.4 The independent providers capacity varies, but each is offering approximately 2 days a week to Halton. They are working with children with an EHCP where there is a primary or secondary need of ASD or SLCN recorded within the document.

Between January and April, the providers mainly worked within the primary school clusters:

- Pinch of SALT Runcorn Clusters 1 and 2
- Speech Wise Runcorn Cluster 3
- Lifelong Language Runcorn Cluster 4
- Talking Toolbox Widnes Cluster 5
- CommuniKATE Widnes Cluster 6 and 7

3.5 During April 2025, HBC allocated further young people to the independent providers including secondary schools and agreeing a cohort approach with our special schools Ashley, Cavendish, Chesnut lodge and Brookfields. This included ensuring that all starters and leavers would have a SLCN care plan to support the transition process. The below shows the current breakdown of activity and allocation, with the special schools work due to start in June / July and continue into the autumn term.

Provider	EY	EOTA	Primary	Secondary	OOB	SS	Total
Talking Toolbox		3	39	96	0	1	139
CommuniKATE		1	48		5	55	109
Life Long Language		0	25	28	0	16	69
SpeechWise	9	2	38	5	1		55
Pinch of SALT		1	47	1		5	54
Total	9	7	197	130	6	77	426

3.6 HBC Children's Commissioning team meets each month with the independent providers to review activity, progress and agree interventions / support that may be required. To date, outside of special school numbers the providers have completed 50% of assessments. All providers have scoped out to complete all assessments (except special schools) by end of the summer term.

3.7 It is important at this stage to highlight that the Speech and Language therapists have also been completing modelling and training with staff as well as direct interventions and therapy with young people. At this stage this has been for 91 young people. They have also scheduled in appropriate reviews either half termly, termly or annually. They have also identified 38 children that no longer require SLT support.

3.8 One of the above providers has provided clinic space through their own clinic where Halton parents have agreed to travel to access support at weekends. This provider is also working with some secondary school children throughout the summer holidays at Halton venues.

3.9 At the end of summer term, HBC Children's Commissioning team will be able to show a breakdown of activity and spend on this area of work. This will ultimately show that those identified young people have received specialist intervention in a timely manner to assist with their speech, language and communication requirements as outlined within their ECHPs.

3.10 HBC have initially agreed to continue to use the five independent providers until the end of 2025. This will be reviewed in October 2025 and can be extended, if required.