

CHILDREN YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Children Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board on Monday, 8 September 2025 in the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Logan (Chair), Baker, Fry, Jones, P. Lloyd Jones, C. Plumpton Walsh, Ratcliffe and Ryan.

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Goodall and Dourley.

Absence declared on Council business: None.

Officers present: K. Appleton, M. Bridge, Z. Fearon, B. Holmes, K. Butler and I. Moorhouse.

Also in attendance: S. Smith – Co-Optee and Councillor T. McInney in accordance with Standing Order Number 33.

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

CYP13 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2025, were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

It was confirmed that the Windmill Children's Centre was no longer considered for closure, and this will be shown in future reports.

CYP14 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

It was confirmed that no public questions had been received.

N.B. Councillor Lloyd-Jones declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the following item of business as he was helping a resident obtain a loan.

CYP15 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES

The minutes relating to the Children, Young People

and Families Portfolio, taken from the Executive Board meetings held since the last meeting of this Board, were attached as Appendix 1 for information.

It was noted that the part 2 Executive Board report EXB10 – Funding for Extension, would go back to the next meeting on 11 September 2025, following further work.

CYP16 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (CYP) Q1 2025-26 MONITORING REPORT

The Board received the performance management report for Quarter 1 for 2025-26.

The key priorities for development or improvement in 2023/24 were agreed by Members and included in the Business Plan, for the various functional areas reporting to the Board as detailed below:

- Education, Inclusion, Provision Services
- Children and Families Services

The report detailed the progress made against objectives and milestones and performance targets and provided information relating to key developments and emerging issues that had arisen during the period.

Highlights included permanent exclusions being reduced by 18%, more engagement at family centres, EHCP (education, health and care plan) annual reviews improving to above the national average, and over £1.2million in cost avoidance for high-cost residential placements. There were three residential placements in this quarter which was down from 17 in the previous quarter. An ICT commission was underway for the SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) Team to reduce the backlog, and 189 social workers were trained in house.

Following some questions from the Board the following points were made:

- The amount of progress done in a short amount of time was very good concerns were raised over secondary schools permanently excluding pupils for first time drug offences. They felt that these exclusions should only happen if there was a risk to pupil life, for example if a Class A or B drug was being supplied.
- The Council was limited in how they could influence school drug policies, but they were holding targeted support meetings with schools

to look at frequently absent pupils and those who were electively home educated. This was to stop the 'flow' out of the school following permanent exclusions for drug related reasons. Officers had 'reflective challenges' with schools to get them to reduce permanent exclusions and work with affected families on this alongside multi-agency partners.

- The new Family Support Days, especially the 'Dad Matters Days' were praised as they were a good way for dads to support each other.
- Officers planned to use AI to create guides, take minutes in strategy discussions and for supervision notes.
- Half of the secondary schools in Halton had banned mobile phones on their premises. A lot of parents initially objected to this but there were a lot more benefits than issues raised from the bans.
- The services that SEND must provide make it very difficult for them not to overspend. Work was being done to slow the growth of the number of children coming into care and recruit more foster carers.
- Agency staff costs had reduced from £6.5 million to £3.8 million through workforce strategies, recruitment and investment in the services.
- Some funding for care services came from Central Government, but this funding was limited and reduced significantly when a child turned 18 and the Council needed to provide the same service.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CYP17 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY DESIGNATED OFFICER (LADO)

The Board considered a report on the Annual Report of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) which provided a summary and analysis of the work of the LADO service for 2024-2025. The report detailed progress made against objectives set previously and provided information relating to key developments and emerging issues that arose during the reporting period.

Members discussed the report and subsequently requested some anonymised case studies to help provide an understanding of a LADO referral.

RESOLVED: That the Annual LADO Report for 2024-25 be noted.

CYP18 QUARTERLY QUALITY ASSURANCE REPORT

The Board received an update on the quality of practice in Children's Services through audit findings. AI was being used to help record discussions and this would save practitioners time with trying to record discussions. Families had given positive feedback to social workers, and the Council's audits showed that practices had improved. Training had been undertaken with partners to improve safeguarding referrals to the Council.

Following some questions from the Board the following points were made:

- There had been a reduction in care leaver reports being unfinished. Teams had been advised that this was unacceptable as the reports were needed to monitor progress.
- The Social Worker Academy had recently finished working with Children's Services regarding their audit reports and they will soon start work with the Care Leavers Team.
- The LGA (Local Government Association) will audit the Care Leaver Service in October 2025. This will include looking at audit reports and talking to care leavers and staff about their experience.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CYP19 HALTON LOCAL AREA SEND PARTNERSHIP IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

The Board received Halton's SEND Improvement Programme which was submitted to OFSTED following the Local Area Partnership SEND Inspection. In November 2023, there was an Ofsted and CQC visit where it was shown that there were systematic failings in the Council's SEND provision.

The Board received a presentation that outlined the planned improvements with the new SEND strategic and delivery boards. Officers were keen to improve communication for families, reduce repetition for officers, and ensure that families felt there were improvements and received information quicker. The new strategy was done with families and other relevant partners in 21 engagement

sessions. The new programme should go live in January 2026 after the board reviews it in November 2025. The new programme will also include a formal escalation process if the actions already carried out did not have the desired impact. Partnership work was done to save money on specialist furniture for SEND children and work was planned to provide support for neurodivergent pupils. There will be a new speech & language assessor provider from November 2025. Officers concluded that a new SEND White Paper was expected from the Department of Education (DfE) in the Autumn of 2025.

Following some questions from the Board the following points were made:

- Regarding the White Paper, it was predicted that it would state that only children with complex needs would be allowed EHCPs.
- The White Paper was expected to give SEND money provision directly to schools and not via the Council, which meant they would not be able to support mainstream schools with SEND issues.
- Private assessments for children possibly needing EHCPs would need to be scrutinised more against what an education provider could give. If a EHCP was declined and went to a Tribunal, risks would need to be managed.
- Regarding the speech and language provider, a new company was being brought in due to issues with the current one. The ICB (Integrated Care Board) would manage one aspect of this, and the Council would manage the other.
- If an EHCP said interventions were needed for a child, then the Council would need to ensure that this was delivered. The ICB would manage the health aspects.
- If the SEND Team was to be inspected soon, inspectors should see that there had been progress made against the five action plans.
- The Council received £1.6 million to increase SEND provision for schools in-borough. This included new classrooms at Ashley High School and other schools were asked if they wanted access to the funding to help their provision.

Officers agreed to provide a copy of the PowerPoint Slides to the Board.

RESOLVED: That the Board approve Halton's Local Area SEND Partnership Improvement Programme as the mechanism to monitor and scrutinise progress going forward.

Director of
Education

CYP20 CARE EXPERIENCED AS A 'PROTECTED CHARACTERISTIC'

The Board received a report supporting the motion of 'care experienced' becoming a protected characteristic for young people. The purpose of this was to try and end discrimination for care experienced young people. If accepted, the Council will be one of 32 Council's in the country considering this proposal.

The Board discussed how this would have an impact on new private care homes.

It was confirmed that the characteristic would be recognised permanently so adults with care experience could be signposted for support.

Following a vote by way of a show of hands, the Board agreed that 'Care Experienced' should be a protected characteristic.

RESOLVED: That the Board recommends that the Council recognise 'Care Experienced' as a protected characteristic.

CYP21 COUNCILWIDE SPENDING AS AT 31 MAY 2025

The Council received a report on the Council's overall revenue spending position as of 31 May 2025, the latest 2025/26 year-end outturn forecast, and details of the 2024/25 year-end outturn position for their information. All Policy and Public Performance Boards had received this report.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Meeting ended at 8:29p.m.