REPORT TO:	Children Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board
DATE:	10 November 2025
REPORTING OFFICER:	Executive Director of Children's Services
PORTFOLIO:	Children, Young People & Families
SUBJECT:	Children's Services Directorate Quarterly Monitoring Report (Q2 2025/26)
WARD(S)	Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide PPB with an update on the quality of practice in Children's Services through audit findings.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That the report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 This report provides an overview of progress against key priorities and milestones for the Children's Services Directorate during Quarter 2 of 2025/26, aligned to the Halton Children and Young People's Plan. It covers performance, service developments, and emerging challenges across Children's Social Care, Early Help, Education, and SEND.

Key Highlights

- Family Hub Engagement: Attendance increased by 2% to 12,128 visits, with individual reach up 23.5% (3,940 individuals), reflecting strong community engagement and partnership work.
- Edge of Care Service: Launched June 2025, showing early impact in reducing residential placements.
- Pre-Proceedings Outcomes: 45% of cases stepped down to Child Protection planning (up from 35% in Q1), indicating improved success in preventing care entry.
- Children in Care: Numbers rose to 384, driven by higher entrants and fewer exits. Permanency planning remains a priority.
- Placement Stability: Improved, with 10.4% of children experiencing 3+ moves in 12 months. New stability meeting process introduced.

- SEND Provision: EHCP timeliness at 57.5% (above national average); annual reviews improved to 67.2%. Plans for new High Needs Units progressing.
- Education Outcomes: Early Years settings maintain 99% good or outstanding; primary schools at 86%, secondary at 71%.
- Exclusions & Suspensions: Significant reduction in suspensions (20 in September vs. 76 last year) and permanent exclusions (3 vs. 4).
- Attendance: Slight decline across all phases; PRU attendance improved to 45.1%.
- NEET Figures: Reduced to 7.6%, continuing positive trajectory despite post-16 provision challenges.
- Workforce Development: 164 staff accessed Social Work Academy training; recruitment and retention strategies ongoing to reduce agency reliance.
- Health & Wellbeing: Breastfeeding rates improved significantly; Healthy Schools Programme expanded; HENRY parenting programme referrals exceeded targets.

Emerging Challenges

- Rising numbers of Children in Care and associated placement costs remain above budget despite cost avoidance measures.
- Recruitment of foster carers continues to lag behind demand, impacting sufficiency.
- School Attendance rates show a downward trend compared to previous year.
- SEND out-of-borough placements and costs remain a pressure point, though mitigation plans are in progress.

Next Steps

- Continue embedding Edge of Care and Family Hub models to reduce care demand.
- Progress sufficiency strategy for local residential and fostering provision.
- Deliver SEND improvement actions, including ARP development and SaLT service redesign.
- Implement attendance strategy under new DfE statutory duties.
- Advance workforce stability through permanent recruitment and training.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Progress against Halton Children and Young People’s Plan and statutory duties under Children Act and SEND Code of Practice.

4.2 Expansion of Family Hubs integrating early help and outreach services.

4.3 SEND Strategy: Development of Additional Resource Provisions (ARPs) and improved EHCP timeliness.

4.4 Placement Sufficiency: Strategies to reduce reliance on out-of-borough placements.

4.5 Education Inclusion: Delivery of new statutory duties under DfE’s attendance guidance and Priority Education Action Area Plan.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Residential Placements forecast reduced to £27.7m but remains above £27.5m budget.

5.2 Independent Fostering Agency forecast increased to £6.7m (above £5.4m budget).

5.3 SEND Out-of-Borough provision spending reduction anticipated via ARPs.

5.4 Additional funding: £1m DBV grant and £1.8m Priority Education Action Area allocation over three years.

5.5 Financial statement for Q2 available end of October 2025.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL’S PRIORITIES

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

n/a

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

n/a

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

Safeguarding & Permanency: 45% of pre-proceedings cases stepped down to Child Protection planning.

Children in Care increased to 384; permanency planning remains priority.

Placement stability improved: 10.4% of CIC experienced 3+ moves.

SEND: EHCP timeliness at 57.5%; annual reviews at 67.2%.

Education outcomes strong: 86% primary, 71% secondary schools rated Good/Outstanding.

Exclusions reduced: suspensions down to 20 incidents; permanent exclusions down to 3.

Attendance slightly declined; PRU attendance improved to 45.1%.

NEET figures reduced to 7.6% (from 8.8% last year).

Voice of Children: Children in Care Council membership increased to 14 active participants.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

n/a

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

n/a

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

n/a

7.0 Risk Analysis

7.1 None.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 None.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None.

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

‘None under the meaning of the Act.’