

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, 10 November 2025 in the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Logan (Chair), Goodall (Vice-Chair), Baker, Fry, Jones, P. Lloyd Jones, Ratcliffe and Ryan

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Dourley and C. Plumpton Walsh

Absence declared on Council business: None.

Officers present: K. Appleton, J. Dunning, P. France, B. Holmes, G. Prince, and I. Moorhouse.

Also in attendance: S. Turner (Observing) and Councillor T. McIrney in accordance with Standing Order Number 33.

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

	<i>Action</i>
CYP22 MINUTES	<p>The Minutes of the meeting held on the 8th September 2025 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.</p>
CYP23 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME	<p>It was confirmed that no public questions had been received.</p>
CYP24 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES	<p>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.</p> <p>It was confirmed that the report on Home to School Transport for SEND children will go to Executive Board in November. Even though the PPB was not referenced in the report, the Portfolio Holder stated that he would notify Executive Board that the recommendations in the report</p>

came from the PPB.

CYP25 CHILDREN'S SERVICES DIRECTORATE QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT (Q2 2025/26)

The Board received the performance management report for Quarter 2 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.

There had been an increased attendance in the Family Engagement Hub and the Edge of Care Service successfully reducing residential placements. More children were placed in care which raised the number to 384 but this number included care leavers. Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) timeliness was above the national average and timeliness had improved with EHCP annual reviews.

The new Ofsted framework had been launched, and secondary school standings had increased above 71% for good or outstanding Ofsted grading. There had been a significant drop in exclusions and suspensions and attendance in mainstream schools but attendance at the PRU (Pupil Referral Unit) had improved.

164 staff members had received training through the Social Work Academy. There had been a reduction in using agency staff due to successful recruitment of agency workers by the Council. There had been an increase in permanent staff off long-term sick.

The Council struggled to recruit foster carers, but this was a national problem. To mitigate this, a new App had been launched called 'Tell A Friend' which had some success but did not cover sufficiency needs.

Schools were contacted to see if they would be interested in expanding their resource provision for SEND pupils and at least six schools expressed an interest in this. Consultations will be had with these schools, their

communities and the DfE around this. Ashley High School will have four new classrooms built on site for their pupils by September 2026 and Brookfields School was also looking to expand their provision. Officers wanted to focus on SEND provision being expanded in secondary schools as this was where the demand was.

Prior to the meeting, several members of the Board received a presentation on the Youth Trailblazer Project (YTP) for care leavers and NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) young people. The project's purpose was to help young people access employment or education and it utilised money from Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCR).

For the future, officers would focus on reducing care demand, stabilising fostering provision, and helping create a care home with non-for-profit organisations.

It was noted that there was no alternative building for the PRU to move to and there were no funds available to build a new PRU. This was a priority for the Council's Strategic Asset Plan. Officers were working with the Headteacher of the PRU to ensure that they received all the provisions needed to educate the pupils there. This included a incentivising curriculum and well-trained teachers. The PRU enhanced its breakfast club provision, and it now had 10 children attending on average daily. To improve attendance, the PRU had a minibus to pick up pupils so they would not need to rely on public transport.

In terms of funding, LCR would like to continue doing NEET work at a local level so possible delays with Central Government could be avoided.

Officers had worked hard to reduce delays with court hearings regarding SGOs (Special Guardianship Orders). They previously took up to two years but recently cases had been resolved in less than three months. Work had been done to reduce the amount of time that C2 applications (an application in existing court proceedings relating to children) took due to the rising number of children in care. Legal orders caused delays with moving children out of foster placements onto SGOs. Delays for court hearings could take up to four and a half months.

Discussions were had with a national provider regarding getting children to school, but funding was needed from the DfE (Department of Education) to do this. This scheme would improve student attendance and academic

attainment for when they are in care.

The following additional information was provided in response to Member's questions:

- A court order would be required to remove a child from their home. However, if a child was deemed to be at immediate risk, then the police would administer a police protection order, or an emergency protection order could be issued. If there were court delays, then a Section 20 could be discussed with the child's parent or guardian as this would mean the child is voluntarily put into care.
- Cost Placement Panels will report to Corporate Parenting Board as part of the new structure. Historically, they reported to the Head of Children's Services.
- Debts from placements had increased due to residential placement costs increasing and there not being enough in-house foster carers. This was being addressed through the DCS Forum.
- The Board noted that officers worked hard to try to mitigate rising residential placement costs for out of borough placements, but Central Government would need to help all local authorities resolve this issue as it was a national issue.
- Officers confirmed that risk assessments were put in place to protect children and teachers when violent incidents happened in school. The children and school staff involved in any reported incidents were safe and positive feedback had been received from the headteachers of schools where these incidents happened.
- JUNO is a non-for-profit organisation who LCR partnered with to purchase properties and turn them into in-borough care homes. They had recently bought one property in Halton and planned to purchase two more. There will be eight placements by 2027. It was noted that large numbers at residential homes would not be accepted by Ofsted

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CYP26 QUARTERLY REPORT FROM THE HALTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP

The Board considered the Quarterly Report from the Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership. The report detailed the achievements of the Partnership and how it

addressed areas for improvement that were identified in the Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) Business Plan. The key priorities for development or improvement were agreed by strategic leaders and included in the HSCP Business Plan 2024-27.

Progress had been made against the Council's priorities and the work done by the multi-agency strategic group. The Partnership had three goals: improve the quality and timeliness of practices regarding neglect; safeguarding children from violence and exploitation; and protecting children as victims of domestic abuse.

Weekly safeguarding meetings were held regarding children who were identified as high risk and monthly operational meetings were held to discuss concerning trends, for example, the rise in ketamine use. The Partnership had formed a robust response to this including awareness activities.

A mock inspection was undertaken for child domestic abuse victims, and this showed that insufficient services were in place. Therefore, awareness raising undertaken with different age groups and schools were being informed in a timelier matter when incidents happened so they could support the child in their school who were affected.

Work had done to train frontline practitioners and improve attendance for high-risk children. Work needed to be done to improve transitional safeguarding between child and adult social care.

The Board praised the work done by the Partnership.

The following additional information was provided in response to Member's questions:

- Following some investigation work, officers found a high correlation between poverty and neglect for children. Therefore, they planned to tackle the root cause of this.
- As teenage pregnancy was a lot higher in Halton than the national average, the health and education sub-boards will investigate this imminently.
- Drug usage had reduced amongst young people following the success of workshops focusing on this.
- Schools recently received a new toolkit to ensure that they were being 'inclusive by design'. The toolkit will be highlighted through numerous workshops and training.

- It was confirmed that the Council adopted the Joseph Rowntree definition of poverty regarding its children.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CYP27 HALTON'S VIRTUAL SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25

The Board considered the Virtual School Annual Report 2024-25 which covered the educational outcomes and achievement for Halton's Children in Care, and the school's wider work across children's services.

The school was going through a restructure which was planned for January 2026 due to the increased number of children coming into care. The school's priorities were a new reading support programme, a Virtual School College to help NEET care experienced young people, improving attendance and reducing exclusions, and supporting vulnerable groups.

75 children moved placements, and 26 children moved school, but these moves were structured and planned. Exam results were good, attendance had improved, and exclusions and suspensions had reduced. 73% of year 12 and 13 pupils were in further education or employment.

There had been an increased number of delegates attending training and the training offer for parents and foster carers had been increased.

Work was planned to ensure that new school starters were ready for school and officers were keen for children in care and with social workers, to perform as well as children not in care. More support around maths was planned as this was a subject that pupils struggled with.

It was planned that six new members of staff will join the school, and they will help support the physical schools that virtual school pupils attended and their families.

The following additional information was provided in response to Member's questions:

- Every local authority must have a virtual school which would oversee the education outcomes for children in care.
- Children still attend a physical school and could go to a school anywhere in the country, but they must be a Halton child to be monitored by the virtual school.

- The Virtual School worked closely with the YTP (Youth Trailblazer Project), and they put plans in place together for young people in the virtual school.
- The Board will receive a full report on NEET children at the meeting in January 2026. The Board requested that this report include overlaps with the YTP.
- Officers linked in with the Literacy Trust and hosted three events for parents and carers to promote reading for pleasure to children. They will review its courses.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CYP28 SCHOOL PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES 2025

The Board considered a presentation on the performance outcomes for schools across Halton at the end of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), and Key Stages 2, 4 and 5. In the accompanying presentation it was noted that:

- There were no progress measures for the primary stage or transition stages due to Covid-19 as the current Year 7's did not sit exams in Year 2 and the current Year 11's did not sit exams in Year 6.
- Halton had a higher percentage of EHCP, SEND, and children that received free school meals compared to the national average.
- Early Year profiles which are done at the end of reception, increased in 'good level of development' nationally and in Halton to 68% and 62% respectively.
- The performance of SEND children and children with EHCPs decreased but children who received free school meals improved in their academic performance and were above the national average.
- 76% of pupils in Halton passed their phonics exam in Year 1 compared to 80% nationally.
- 69% of children listed as 'most vulnerable' achieved their expected standard compared to 67% nationally.
- Halton matched the national average in reading, writing and maths as a combined score but were below the national average at 'greater depth'.
- More 'disadvantaged children' in Halton scored 2% higher than the national average in reading, writing and maths.
- In 2025, Halton pupils with EHCP pupils outperformed the national average for EHCP pupils.
- Halton's Key Stage 4 results were not as good as its Key Stage 2 results, and they were below the national average but there was visible improvement 'at pace' after a drop the previous year.

- In terms of 'Level 8' attainment for GCSE results, this had improved so Halton was closing the gap with the national average.
- English and maths results were at pre-pandemic performance levels.
- There was a low number of pupils in Halton undertaking the English Baccalaureate but those who did take it performed very well.
- EHCP pupils in Key Stage 4 had achieved close to the national average in their results.
- Three new Early Intervention Officers had been recruited, and they will do collaborative working between headteacher groups.

The following additional information was provided in response to Member's questions:

- The national average attainment performance for children who received free school meals was 51.2% whereas it was 51.7% in Halton.
- Officers planned to hold annual 'keep in touch' meetings with schools to continue exam result improvements.
- Officers will review obtaining more finances for schools who had more 'vulnerable' children.
- External support advisors were effective for schools to help them support vulnerable children.
- Early Intervention Officers visit children in nursery settings. There was no statutory duty for children to attend nurseries, but officers looked at links between educational attainment, safeguarding and non-attendance.
- Officers will bring a presentation on the Cradle to Career Project to January's meeting.
- It was unknown why the English Baccalaureate numbers were low, but it was predicted that it was because pupils did not often like taking a qualification not in English.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Head of
Children's
Services

Meeting ended at 20:54