

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board

**DATE:** 16<sup>th</sup> April 2026

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Zoe Fearon, Executive Director, Children's Services  
Lisa Taylor, Interim Director of Transformation

**PORTFOLIO:** Children and Young People  
Transformation

**SUBJECT:** Children's Services Asset Management  
Masterplan

**WARD(S)** Borough Wide

## 1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 Following the recent 'Children's Services Asset Review', this report provides a strategic overview of capital funding required to align Children's Services assets with the needs of children and families in Halton.

## 2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) The Children's Services Asset Masterplan be noted.
- 2) Council include the capital funding required to meet the objectives of the Children's Social Care Placement and Sufficiency Strategy Invest to Save project within the Capital Programme at an estimated cost of up to £2,156,250 as outlined in paragraph 5.1.
- 3) The Executive Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children & Young People and the Section 151 Officer, is given delegated authority to present a full business case to Management Team for approval to draw down capital funding for each element of the sufficiency strategy as outlined in paragraph 5.1.
- 4) Council include requirements for the Children's Services Asset Masterplan relating to 'Office Space and Service Provision' within the overall Corporate Strategy for Halton's Accommodation & Assets review.

## 3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### 3.1 Executive Summary

This report presents the Children's Services Asset Management Masterplan (CSAM) and seeks Executive Board support to progress the capital investment required to align Children's Services assets with service redesign, statutory improvement requirements, and the needs of children and families in Halton.

#### **Context**

Following the ILACS inspection (May 2024), Children's Services has delivered significant stabilisation and improvement activity, underpinned by:

- The Children's Services Improvement Plan
- Workforce stabilisation and service redesign
- The Children's Social Care Placement and Sufficiency Strategy
- The Families First Partnership Programme

As this work progressed, it became clear that existing assets do not adequately support future service models, placement sufficiency, or community based, multidisciplinary delivery. ICENI Projects were therefore commissioned in October 2025 to undertake a strategic asset review, culminating in the CSAM.

#### **The Asset Masterplan**

The CSAM identifies two core asset requirements:

##### 1. Placement Sufficiency Assets (Priority)

Expanding high quality, in-borough residential and supported accommodation to reduce reliance on high cost, out of borough placements.

##### 2. Office and Service Delivery Space

Ensuring fit for purpose accommodation to support Families First delivery, redesigned services, workforce wellbeing and multiagency working (to be aligned with the Council's wider corporate accommodation strategy).

Given inspection expectations, financial pressures and service risk, placement sufficiency is the immediate priority.

#### **Proposed Capital Programme – Invest to Save**

The sufficiency element of the CSAM proposes a phased Invest to Save programme (2026–2028) comprising:

- Four children's homes (12 beds) delivered through a partnership with We Are Juno CIC

- Replacement and expansion of care leaver provision (Park House / Appleton Village)
- New 16+ supported accommodation
- 18+ supported independent living provision

Capital investment required: up to **£2.156m**

Estimated borrowing cost: **c. £0.185m per annum**

Forecast recurring revenue benefit: **c. £2.0m per annum** through reduced external placement costs

The cost model applies a worst case scenario to avoid overstating return on investment. Each phase will be brought forward as separate business cases for approval.

***Key Benefits of Sufficiency Element***

- Improved placement stability, quality and outcomes for children and young people.
- Reduced trauma through local provision and continuity of education, health and family links.
- Significant reduction in reliance on high cost external placements.
- Improved financial sustainability and budget predictability.

***Governance and Assurance***

Delivery will be managed through the Children’s Services Transformation Programme governance, with robust project controls, financial assurance, risk management and benefits tracking. An annual review will confirm ongoing demand and value for money.

**3.2 Background and progress so far;**

Following the ILACS in May 2024 and subsequent inspection report in July 2024, Children’s Services developed a programme around the stabilisation and redesign of Children’s Social Care to become a proactive early intervention and prevention system across Halton.

The following workstreams were approved within the programme:

1. A ‘Children’s Services Improvement Plan’ addressing the 12 key areas highlighted in the ILACS inspection report. (reporting to the independently chaired multi-agency ‘Children’s Services Improvement Board’)
2. Stabilisation and redesign of the workforce to enable sustainable transformation of the system (reporting to the Redesign Financial Accountability Board). This included a commitment to both new services in Children’s Social Care and a move to a community-based service offer for Halton’s Children and Families.

3. 'Children's Social Care Placement and Sufficiency Strategy' designed to provide a range of placements, including children's homes, supported accommodation and foster care, that provide nurturing and safe care and support, within Halton Borough.

All workstreams are underway and significant improvements are evident.

### **3.3 Children's Placements and Sufficiency**

A major finding of the ILACS inspection in May 2024 was that our placement provision for children in care and care leavers needs significant improvement. A lack of accommodation options within the Halton Borough has resulted in reliance on high-cost external providers, some of which are out of the area.

As a corporate parent, we want children to live locally with family members wherever possible and have access to local services that provide for their long-term health, mental health, education, and any other identified specialist needs. Where this is not possible, we need a range of in-borough placements, including children's homes, supported accommodation and foster carers, to meet these needs. The Sufficiency Strategy seeks as far as possible to address these issues and aims to deliver local, high-quality, cost-effective placements for both children in care and care leavers. The aim of these placements is to provide value for money, tailored care, allowing children to engage with their local community, school, friends and family.

### **3.4 Families First Partnership Programme**

In March 2025 the government issued 'The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme Guide', which followed from an independent review of the social care system that highlighted significant systemic challenges. Through stabilisation and redesign of the service, we had already started the journey of working towards a community-based, partner-wide approach of helping families, offering responsive, skilled and intensive support. Government guidance has vindicated the work we had already begun and, through the Families First Partnership, the ambition is to continue to work towards establishing a multi-disciplinary service, which, alongside social workers and early help family workers, and our partners will provide high quality, consistent support to the families of Halton.

Halton's Families First Partnership Programme is partner-wide and, as such, is governed by a Partnership Board inclusive of our health, police, education and voluntary sector partners. It will begin under the umbrella of 'Family Help' and starts with a pilot team, which is the first multi-

disciplinary service to test and learn working in this new way and is set to launch February 2026 and run to August 2026.

### 3.5 Children's Services Assets

Working through the improvement plan, redesign, Families First Partnership Programme and placements sufficiency it became apparent that some of Halton's Children's Services assets require some changes to meet future demands for the service and the children and families of Halton.

The Transformation Delivery Unit have commissioned an asset master plan project, the purpose of which is to anticipate and plan for future asset needs for Children's Social Care. The goal was to undertake a strategic review and planning exercise to provide Halton with detailed options, and costing for assets/infrastructure requirements needed to support the ambitions of Halton in delivery of the improvement plan, the redesign, Families First Partnership Programme and placements sufficiency strategy.

In October 2025 ICENI Projects were commissioned to undertake this strategic review with 3 key objectives:

1. Sufficiency space: The Children's Services Asset Masterplan (CSAM) will need to incorporate the sufficiency activity, with the objective of ensuring that future plans are considered and aligned within the masterplan.
2. Office space: The CSAM will need to review where staff are based and office space available for desks & meeting rooms with the objective of ensuring that we can meet the ambitions of our redesign and the government reforms.
3. Service Delivery Space: The CSAM will need to incorporate requirements for direct working with family, such as edge of care and family time team work, with the objective of ensuring Halton has adequate space that is fit for purpose for direct work with children and families.

The review is now complete and all findings, with options for Children's Services Assets, can be found in 'Halton Children's Services Asset Masterplan', appendix 1.

Following staff engagement with stakeholders across Children's Services, ICT, Assets and Finance departments, all options have been considered and further refined to feasible, realistic options for capital works over the next 3 years. The final proposal, with financial implications, can be found in appendix 2 and the sufficiency element of the proposal is summarised in section 5.1 of this report.

The options have been categorised into sufficiency and office/provision space. It is recognised that the sufficiency element of the proposal needs to be prioritised to enable Halton to bring young people back into the Borough and reduce high cost placements from out of borough and external residential providers. It is also recognised that the office/provision element of the proposal needs to be included as part of Halton's corporate asset and accommodation review. That said, both sufficiency and office/provision are tied to strict government timelines through ILACS and the Families First Partnership Programme and therefore must be prioritised as part of any corporate approach.

### **3.6 Benefits of Investing in a Children's Services Asset Masterplan**

#### **Improved Placement Sufficiency**

- Enhanced control over placement quality and stability through greater proportion of internal residential and supported accommodation services.
- Reduced demand pressures as high-quality internal homes offer earlier intervention opportunities and help prevent escalation into crisis placements.
- Lower expenditure and improved budget predictability by reducing dependency on high-cost private providers and market-driven price inflation.
- Better continuity for children and young people, with local homes enabling consistent education, health provision, peer networks and family contact.
- Reduced trauma and improved outcomes by avoiding out-of-borough moves and the disruption associated with distant placements.
- Improved Social Worker efficiency, with reduced travel time enabling more direct work with children and families.
- Strengthened specialist practice, with opportunities to embed consistent therapeutic approaches and specialist training (e.g., SEND, safeguarding, PACE, trauma-informed care).
- Smoother transitions for 16–18s and care leavers through integrated supported accommodation that promotes independence and reduces homelessness risk.

#### **Improved Office Space and spaces for direct work with Children & Families (Families First and Children's Services Redesign)**

- Co-location of teams, improved collaboration between social care, early help, safeguarding, SEND services, health and education partners.
- More efficient use of the Council's estate, creating a more sustainable portfolio aligned to service needs.

- Enhanced workforce wellbeing and retention, with modern workspaces that support hybrid working, reflective practice and professional development.
- Improved service responsiveness as integrated teams can work more effectively together to address risk and coordinate support.
- Earlier, intensive family support, reducing the likelihood of family breakdown and the need for children to enter care.
- Stronger family networks and kinship arrangements, enabling more children to remain safely within their extended family.
- A more stable, well-supported workforce, with better environments for direct family work, multi-agency planning and therapeutic intervention.
- Improved multi-agency coordination, reducing duplication and drift through closer alignment with police, health, and education partners.
- Reduced long-term costs by preventing escalation into statutory services and reducing reliance on residential care and crisis provision.

### **3.7 Project delivery, monitoring and governance**

The programme of capital works will show progress and accountability through the governance structure of the Transformation programme.

One of the key roles of the TDU programme support is to provide the Executive Director for Children's Services the rigour and detail around monitoring of all impacts and financial implications.

This will be undertaken in line with the existing governance structure and reported through the Redesign Financial Accountability Board.

Each part of the Sufficiency Strategy will receive robust project management including:

- Tight delivery and financial controls
- Stringent processes and assurance
- Ownership
- Delivery planning and assurance
- Communication
- Collaborative delivery across the council departments
- Impact measure monitoring

All the above activity will be supported by the relevant corporate function through each stage of the decision making.

This will be overseen through robust governance structures prior to being presented to Management Team.

An annual review will take place to ensure continued demand is evident.

## 4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The capital proposal, if approved, would lead to improvements in placements for children, office space for staff and service delivery space for children and families.

There would be a full implementation plan providing the rigour and transparency needed ensuring that funding is utilised in the right parts of the system.

Approval of capital funding will not only support our children to achieve better outcomes, prepare them for adulthood but will also enable them to become valued members of our society supporting Halton of the future. Without this, it is anticipated that we will fail to meet all the recommendations outlined by Ofsted (May 2024) and our statutory duty under the Children's and Family Act 2004 where the main principle is to make a positive and significant contribution to the lives of children. We also anticipate failure to deliver a community-based model through the Families First Programme and failure to deliver improved value for money and care through placements for our children.

Whilst there is no plan for specific policies to be changed at this time, by nature of transformation and the capital works, some policies may be identified as needing to be reviewed.

These would all follow the Council's process for reviewing and agreeing and implementing policies.

## 5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 It is recognised there will need to be some fluidity in Halton's approach to enable the service to be responsive to an ever-changing landscape in Children's Services and across Local Government, as such, though the project will still be delivered within the approved capital funding envelope, the order of project delivery may vary over time.

The proposal is therefore indicative and it is likely that it will change, in parts, over a 3 year implementation period. On approval, individual proposals will be submitted to Management Team over the next three years to release the capital funding in line with programme requirements and priorities.

The full description of the proposal, with options, can be found in appendix 2.

### **Children's Asset Management Plan Cost Estimation**

#### **(Sufficiency Element)**

Halton Borough Council and We Are Juno CIC have entered into a collaborative partnership aimed at expanding high-quality residential



care provision for children and young people within the borough. Under this arrangement, both organisations share risk and responsibility while co-designing new children’s homes, ensuring that each setting is shaped by principles of coproduction, trust, and input from care-experienced children and adults.

The partnership forms a core element of Halton’s Children’s Residential Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2025–2028 and includes one project to develop four residential homes across Runcorn and Widnes, delivered jointly through a mix of council-provided and provider-sourced properties.

In addition to the new residential homes being developed in partnership with Juno, Halton Borough Council is also progressing plans for a further three supported accommodation properties designed for young people aged 16 and over. These settings will provide structured, supportive environments that help young people develop the practical and emotional skills needed to live independently within the borough. Services of this type play an important role in Halton’s care and leaving-care pathway, offering safe accommodation alongside support with daily living skills, confidence-building, education, and employment readiness.

The cost estimation methodology applies a worst-case scenario approach to ensure the return on investment is not overstated. The assumptions underpinning the cost model are detailed in Appendix 3.

Tables below show the individual project impact followed by the final table which summarises the overall impact.

<b>Project 1: Partnership with Juno</b>	
Description	Collaborative partnership to develop four residential homes across Runcorn and Widnes for children and young people ages 8-18.
Capacity	12
Support Type	Various types of support ranging across medium and medium high complexity support needs, dependent on the prevalent needs of the children at the time.
When Online	2026 through to 2028
Investment Needed	£1.475m
Cost of Borrowing	£0.127m per annum for 20 years
Annual Financial Impact	£0.056m cost reduction per annum recurring

<b>Project 2: Park House/Appleton Village</b>	
Description	Replacement for current provision designed to increase capacity and

	quality of support for care leavers between the age of 16 and 17.
Capacity	5
Support Type	Care Leaver Focus (16-18 years)
When Online	Autumn 2026
Investment Needed	£0.331m
Cost of Borrowing	£0.028m over 20 years
Annual Financial Impact	£0.606m cost reduction per annum recurring

<b>Project 3: 16+ Supported Accommodation</b>	
Description	Provision of independent supported accommodation for any 16-18 years olds in care with lower complexity of need.
Capacity	10
Support Type	Supported Accommodation
When Online	Autumn 2026
Investment Needed	£0.206m
Cost of Borrowing	£0.018m per annum for 30 years
Annual Financial Impact	£1.252m cost reduction per annum recurring

<b>Project 4: 18+ Supported Independent Living</b>	
Description	Provision of accommodation for young people aged 18 and over who do not meet Care Act eligibility and present with needs that have hindered their development of independent living skills.
Capacity	10
Support Type	Independent supported flats
When Online	Summer 2028
Investment Needed	£0.144m
Cost of Borrowing	£0.012m per annum for 20 years
Annual Financial Impact	£0.093m cost reduction per annum recurring

<b>Sufficiency Invest to Save Programme Overall Impact</b>	
Description	Investment and delivery of the sufficiency strategy in full
Capacity	13 x beds in partnership Children's homes 5 x beds Care Leavers supported living 10 x flats Supported Accommodation 10 x 18+ Supported Independent living flats
When Online	2026 through 2028

Investment Needed	£2.156m
Cost of Borrowing	£0.185m per annum for 20 years
Annual Financial Impact	Circa £2.008m cost reduction per annum recurring

### **Delivery Assumptions/ Considerations**

It is prudent to acknowledge that there are several factors that impact on the final return on investment as follows:

- **Cost of Borrowing**

The interest rates and associated financing costs linked to securing capital, which will directly influence overall affordability and the projected return on investment.

- **Property Acquisition Costs**

The purchase price of suitable properties, including valuation, legal fees, surveys, and any associated transactional costs that impact the total initial investment.

- **Construction and Materials Costs**

Fluctuations in the cost of building materials, labour, and contractor fees, which may affect the viability and timing of capital works.

- **Variability in Residential Placement Costs**

Changes in the cost of external residential placements over time, which may alter the projected financial benefits and payback period of bringing provision in-house.

- **Changing Needs of Children and Young People**

Evolving care, accommodation, and support needs that may influence the scale, design, and long-term suitability of the proposed provision.

- **Interdependencies with Wider Development Activity in the Borough**

Alignment with, or potential impacts from, broader regeneration, housing, or capital development projects that may affect timelines, resource availability, or strategic direction.

### **Proposed Funding Approach**

Based on current rates, the projected cost of borrowing over a 20-year term is estimated at up to £185,322 per year, assuming full utilisation of the available funding, including a 25% contingency. A rigorous approach to project planning and delivery will ensure value for money and responsible use of resources. Contingency funds will only be drawn upon once all alternative options have been fully explored and exhausted.

We anticipate that financial savings will be achieved through a reduction in placement costs. However, the number of children requiring care, and the associated placement demand, is influenced by a wide range of factors and cannot be attributed to a single workstream.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

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

This work will directly impact the promotion of wellbeing and greater independence for children, young people and families. Children's Social Care can have a positive impact on health and wellbeing by improving emotional and mental health, establishing safe environments for children and families to flourish, opening opportunities and improving life chances for those it supports.

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

Increasing in-borough provision supports how we continue to grow the local economy for and with residents by providing new employment and supporting the local economy in Halton.

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

The Corporate Plan is very clear on the priorities for Halton. This business case directly supports priority three: Supporting Children, Young People and Families.

It will support this through the implementation of the early intervention and prevention approach, improving outcomes for children and families as well as strengthening work across the key partnerships within the system.

Where support is required, be it from the Council or one of its partners, we will work to transform the system to ensure that every child and their family receive the right support at the right time to deal with problems at the earliest opportunity, maximising the outcomes for them and their family.

### **6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need**

Strengthening Halton's early intervention and prevention approach to supporting children and families. This also supports the ambition to provide support in a consistent manner and, in turn, ensuring that there is a consistent approach to the delivery of services and breaking down areas of inequality if they are identified.

## **6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future**

Whilst there will be no direct planned impact on a greener future, by nature some of the improvement works will have a positive impact on climate through promoting cultural change and use of technology, online meetings, reduction in printing, reducing travel.

## **6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

Supporting Children Young People and families to nurture and protect every child and young person and raise their aspirations by investing in improving services and provision to ensure they reach their full potential and help Halton families flourish and be valued members of Halton's community.

## **7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The risks below are the key strategic risks that have been identified if this business case recommendations are not agreed:

- Improvement from "Inadequate" does not progress at pace, delaying the improvement of services being provided to the children and families of Halton.
- Outcomes for Children, as identified through inspections, reviews and reports, lead to continued poor inspection results and more importantly, not improving outcomes for the children and families of Halton
- Financially sustainable Children's Services system is not achieved due to the delay in redesign and implementing an early intervention and prevention approach.
- Not correctly understanding and tracking the financial benefits / implications of the capital works may result in the Council being in a financially unsustainable position.
- Not understanding the analysis of demand and complexity growth, which will have a significant impact if this is not under control.
- Financial benefits are not realised due to inability to place children in the homes and the partner places children from outside of the borough – the case takes this in to consideration when looking at capacity/utilisation and impact achievability.
- Further delay to implementation could lead to:

- Breakdown of contract/partnership relationship leading to contractual issues.
- Delay in realising the annual financial benefits – impacting financial recovery.
- Each month delay has financial implications for not moving children in to the more efficient costed placements.

## 7.2 Risk Management Plan

There is a central Risk Log for Children’s Services Improvement and Transformation Programme, and it is expected all project leads will maintain their risks and issues. Any fundamental changes to the capital works needs to be agreed by the Children’s Services Leadership Team to ensure the scope and impact of activity is understood and assessed before progressing, as well as ensuring deliverables are kept specific, tight, managed and smart.

The risk will be managed through a stringed change management plan subject to approval from the Children’s Leadership Team.

## 8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don’t and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don’t.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

## 9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Whilst there will be no direct planned impact on climate change, by nature some of the improvement works will have a positive impact on climate through promoting cultural change and use of technology, online meetings, reduction in printing and reducing travel.

## 10. REASON(S) FOR DECISION

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The decision to take this approach is based on:

1. Supporting the ambitions of the Corporate Plan.
2. Delivering the ambitions and vision of the Children & Young Peoples plan.
3. Transforming the Children's Services system to an early intervention and prevention system whilst addressing the financial sustainability of the local system.
4. Doing the right things for the children and families at Halton
5. And ensuring the right support is available at the right time.

## 11. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

### **Carry on improvement journey without required capital funding**

Work has already begun through the transformation programme to stabilise and transform Children's Services. It had identified requirements and work is in progress.

The pace and impact is severely hampered due to time, cost and resource constraints across the Council, not just in Children's Services.

Progress is being made but not at the scale and pace required to improve services in the manner and pace required by the inspecting bodies.

It was decided early on that to not invest is not an option due to the potential additional impacts/ramifications financially, operationally and reputationally for the Council, and most of all the pace and change needed for the children, young people and their families of Halton.

## 12. **IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

Should approval be given on by the Executive Board on 16th April 2026 then the Implementation programme will commence with immediate effect.

## 13. **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

- MacAlister, J., 2022. The independent review of children's social care.
- Love Barrow Families, 2022. Children's Social Care- The Way Forward
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023) A guide to multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children.

- The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme Guide Delivery expectations for safeguarding partners in England March 2025

**PART 2 REPORTS – N/A**

14. **JUSTIFICATION FOR TAKING THE ITEM IN PART II**

**N/A**