

Halton Children's Services Asset Masterplan

Prepared by Icen Projects
for Halton Borough Council

December 2025

iceni


HALTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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1. Background Information

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Following the ILACS inspection in May 2024 and the subsequent report published in July 2024, Children's Services developed a programme focused on stabilisation and redesign, with the aim of establishing a proactive system of early intervention and prevention across Halton.

The programme comprises three key workstreams:

- 1. Children's Services Improvement Plan:** A comprehensive Improvement Plan addressing the 12 priority areas identified through the ILACS inspection. Delivery is overseen by an independently chaired, multi-agency Children's Services Improvement Board.
- 2. Workforce stabilisation and redesign:** A significant investment to stabilise and redesign the Children's Social Care workforce, enabling sustainable system transformation. This workstream reports to the Redesign Financial Accountability Board and includes the development of new services alongside a shift towards a community-based service offer for children and families in Halton.
- 3. Children's Social Care Placement and Sufficiency Strategy:** A strategy to develop a sufficient range of in-borough placements, including children's homes, supported accommodation and foster care, providing safe, nurturing and sustainable care for children in care and care leavers.

All workstreams are underway and are delivering demonstrable improvements.

Children's Placements and Sufficiency

The ILACS inspection identified significant weaknesses in placement provision for children in care and care leavers. In particular, limited accommodation within Halton has resulted in reliance on high-cost external placements, including those located outside the borough.

As a corporate parent, Halton seeks to support children to live locally wherever possible, including with family members, and to ensure access to services that meet their long-term health, mental health, educational and specialist needs. Where this is not achievable, there must be a sufficient supply of high-quality in-borough placements.

The Placement and Sufficiency Strategy aims to address these challenges by increasing the availability of local, high-quality and cost-effective placements. These placements will support better outcomes for children by enabling them to remain connected to their communities, schools, friends and families, while also delivering value for money.

Families First Partnership Programme

In March 2025, the government published The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme Guide, following an independent review of children's social care which highlighted significant national challenges.

Through the stabilisation and redesign programme, Halton had already begun moving towards a community-based model of early help and intensive family support. The FFP guidance has validated this direction of travel. Participation in the Families First Partnership will enable Halton to further develop a multi-disciplinary approach, bringing together social workers, early help family workers and partner professionals to provide consistent, high-quality support to families.

The programme will commence with a Family Help Team pilot, which will test and learn from new ways of working. The pilot is scheduled to run from February 2026 to August 2026.

1. Background Information

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Children's Assets

Progress across the improvement plan, service redesign, Families First Partnership Programme and placement sufficiency work has highlighted the need to review and adapt Halton's children's assets to meet future demand.

The Transformation Delivery Unit therefore commissioned a Children's Services Asset Masterplan to provide a strategic assessment of current provision and to identify costed options for the assets and infrastructure required to support delivery of these programmes.

In October 2025, ICENI Projects were commissioned to undertake this review, focusing on three areas: sufficiency space for residential, supported accommodation and fostering provision; office space to support service re-organisation; and service delivery space for direct work with children and families, including contact and edge-of-care interventions.

The review is now complete, with findings and options set out in this report. Following engagement with Children's Services, ICT, Assets and Finance colleagues, options have been refined into feasible proposals for capital works over the next three years.

2. Introduction

2. Introduction

INTRODUCTION

Halton Borough Council (HBC) commissioned Icen Projects to develop an Asset Masterplan for Children's Services in Halton.

Children's Services are essential to local communities and help to ensure that every child has the best possible start in life. The 2004 Children Act made local authorities responsible for ensuring and overseeing the effective delivery of services for children, including providing a range of services tailored to children's needs, and working collaboratively with other agencies to improve outcomes for children.

However, the costs of delivering such care have increased exponentially over recent years, while at the same time, council revenues and capacity to deliver services has severely diminished. In Halton, reports of private children homes charging the authority significantly high weekly rates has raised questions over the suitability of current arrangements and identified a need for review to better cater for current and future needs.

Now HBC is implementing a Families First Programme which aims to streamline and coordinate multi-agency and service response to support families and children across the community. This will require a change in ways of working with greater collaboration of council services.

At the heart of the issue lies the importance of children's services delivering support to the most in need and vulnerable members of the community. The adequacy and outcomes of these services can have generational impacts and must be given the importance and focus it deserves.

In this context, HBC have commissioned this strategic review and master-planning exercise to consider options, plans and costs for assets needed to support service delivery now and, in the future, alongside the reforms of the Families First Partnership Programme.

METHODOLOGY & APPROACH

This report has been developed using the following methodology and approach:

- Inception meeting
- Ongoing PM
- Document Review – of key existing and emerging policies and strategies at a local, regional and national level
- Stakeholder Interviews - one-on-one, meetings with more than 10 stakeholders, including private childcare service providers, and HBC staff
- Site Visit – coordinated site visits to all family hubs and HBC owned properties
- Baseline data – detailed analysis of socio-demographic data, focusing on characteristics which may drive demand for children's services
- Projections – population projections, identifying future child service age population
- Supply –review and map existing children's care service spaces, identifying the number, type, location, size, age, and quality of space.
- Demand – assess the potential future demand for various elements of Child Services spaces outline gaps and issues
- Service requirements – consider future service space requirements
- Stakeholder Workshop No.1 – a multi-agency workshop, with up to 15 stakeholders, to discuss the existing space provision, the limitations and future needs for space to adequately service the needs of children across the borough

2. Introduction

METHODOLOGY & APPROACH

- Space provision scenarios – identify potential options for the delivery of adequate space for the provision of service delivery.
- Service cost – a high level cost analysis for the various provision scenarios.
- Workshop No. 2 – a multi-agency workshop with internal Council stakeholders to discuss / finalise the potential options for each asset and to establish priorities.
- Recommendations – based on this analysis we have prepared a series of recommendations for the provision of space to support service delivery.
- Report – This report, presenting the findings of the research, and recommendations and next steps.

CAVEATS

This report has not been produced by a regulated financial advisor (FCA) or RICS qualified consultants nor has it involved QS consultants or architect designs. The approach involves high-level cost benchmarks designed to provide an order of magnitude for potential costs. Further work is needed at the next stage involving feasibility work, architect designs and QS costings.

3. Baseline

3. Baseline

INTRODUCTION

This section provides an overview of the current local policy and strategy for children and family services; socio-demographic data for the borough; a review of the age profile and growth in child age populations; rates of need by current population and socio-demographic character; benchmarks against other areas; and a review of population projections, identifying child service age population and socio-demographic character, taking into account major future development impacts.

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES POLICY

Children Act 2004

The updated Children Act 2004 followed on from the Children Act 1989 which set the foundation of all child protection and welfare work. This established a paramount principle that a child's welfare is the most important consideration and set out a requirement for local authorities to safeguard and promote children's welfare including statutory duties under Children in Need (family support, short breaks, practical assistance) and Child Protection (mandatory investigation where there is reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm). The 2004 update to the Act strengthened inter-agency working and created Local Safeguarding Children's Boards and the role of Director of Children's Services. It also embedded the Every Child Matters outcomes.

Children and Families Act 2014

This Act reformed services for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), extending SEND support up to age 25, and introduced Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans. The Act requires local authorities to publish a Local Offer clearly outlining SEND services and emphasised the involvement of children, young people and parents in decision making. This legislation ensures services are person-centred and better co-ordinated across education, health and social care.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)

This is statutory guidance that sets out how organisations work together to safeguard children. For local authorities this means leading multi-agency safeguarding partnerships with health and police, ensuring early help services are available to prevent escalation to statutory intervention, establishing clear information sharing protocols and ensuring practitioners are trained and supervising effectively. Failure to follow this guidance results in serious safeguarding failures and poor Ofsted outcomes.

Keeping Children Safe in Education

This is statutory guidance that applies to primary schools but has implications for local authorities including supporting schools in safeguarding requirements; ensuring appropriate procedures for reporting concerns, including referrals to children's social care; and promoting safer recruitment practices and safeguarding training. This policy strengthens early identification of abuse and neglect in educational settings.

Children and Social Work Act 2017

This Act strengthens the role of local authorities as corporate parents to looked-after children and care leavers. Key duties include acting in the best interests of children in care; improving stability in placements and educational outcomes; extending personal advisor support for care leavers up to age 25; and promoting access to health services, housing and employment.

Care Leaver Strategy

Local authorities are required to publish a Care Leaver Local Offer, setting out what support care leavers can expect. This includes suitable and stable accommodation; financial support; education, training, and employment opportunities; and access to health and wellbeing services. This policy ensures consistency and transparency in care leaver support across local authorities.

3. Baseline

Stable Homes, Built on Love (2023) – Children’s Social Care Reform Strategy

This strategy followed the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care. Key priorities for local authorities including improving family help and early intervention to prevent children entering care; ensuring children in care have stable placement and strong relationships with trusted adults; strengthening corporate parenting responsibilities and improving support for care leavers.

Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme (2021-present)

The Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme is a national government initiative introduced in 2021 to improve outcomes for children, young people and families by joining up services locally. It builds on the previous early-intervention models such as Sure Start, but is a whole-family, life-course approach.

The programme focuses particularly on the first 1,001 days of a child’s life (from conception to age 2), while Family hubs more broadly support families with children aged 0-19, or up to 25 for young people with SEND. Local authorities are responsible for leading and coordinating the programme at a local level.

The main aims reflect national policy priorities around early help, prevention and reducing inequalities:

- Improve early childhood development, health and school readiness
- Strengthen infant-parent relationships
- Provide earlier, preventative support to families
- Reduce demand on statutory children’s social care services
- Ensure families can access support easily, in one place

A Family Hub is a coordinated network of services designed to be non-stigmatising, accessible and responsive to local needs. These services may include:

- A physical hub (often a repurposed children’s centre)
- Outreach and digital services
- Strong referral pathways between agents

Local authorities must ensure that Family Hubs provide or coordinate access to:

- Health Services: midwifery & health visiting; infant feeding and breastfeeding support; perinatal and parental mental health services; early identification of developmental concerns
- Parenting and Family Support: evidence-based parenting programmes; support for parental conflict and relationship difficulties; domestic abuse awareness and referral pathways; advice on routines, attachment and behaviour
- Early Education and Childcare: support with early learning and school readiness; information on funded childcare entitlements; support for children with SEND
- Youth and Adolescent Support: mental health & emotional wellbeing support; youth services; support with transitions to adulthood

Local authorities have strategic and operational responsibility for the programme including developing a local Family Hub model based on community needs; commissioning and coordinating services; ensuring clear referral pathways into early help and specialist services; and using data to identify families who may benefit from early intervention.

Practitioners are encouraged to build trusted relationships with families to reduce fear and stigma. Family Hubs also play a crucial role in safeguarding through prevention, in a way that aligns with Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023) expectations, with the aim of reducing crisis-driven interventions.

3. Baseline

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES POLICY cont.

Families First Programme

The Families First programme was introduced as a preventative, early-intervention approach for families with multiple and complex needs. The main aim is to support families before problems escalate, reducing the need for statutory interventions under children's social care. It recognises that problems with families are often interconnected and addressing them in isolation is less effective.

Key Principles:

- **Whole-Family Approach:** The programme works with all family members rather than focusing on a single individual. It encourages coordinated support to improve family resilience and long-term outcomes.
- **Early Intervention:** Families are supported before issues escalate into a crisis which prevents unnecessary involvement of statutory child protection services.
- **Strengths-Based Practice:** Practitioners focus on the family's existing strengths and capabilities which builds confidence and skills within the family, empowering them to solve problems independently.
- **Personalised Support:** Each family is assigned a Lead Practitioner who coordinates services, sets goals, monitors progress and ensures accountability.

As part of the programme, local authorities are responsible for:

- Identifying eligible families through referral pathways (e.g. schools, health, police)
- Coordinating multi-agency support which can include:
 - Children's Social Care
 - Education support services

- Health visiting, mental health or substance misuse services
- Housing or employment support
- Voluntary and community sector organisations

- Monitoring and evaluation progress, ensuring goals are met and services are adjusted as needed
- Providing training and supervision for lead practitioners to deliver effective family-focused interventions

Overall, the key components of the Families First Programme are:

- **Lead Practitioner / Key Worker Model** – central to building trust, coordinating services and ensuring consistent support.
- **Family Action Plan** – identifies issues, goals and progress measures, agreed with the family.
- **Multi-Agency Working** – avoids fragmented support and duplication of services.
- **Outcome Measurement** – improvements in children's safety, wellbeing, educational engagement, and family stability.

The expected impact on Children's Services of the programme include:

- Reduced demand on statutory child protection services by resolving issues early
- Improved safeguarding outcomes by identifying risk factors proactively.
- Supported educational engagement by addressing underlying family barriers.
- Strengthened inter-agency collaboration
- Promotion of preventative, cost-effective interventions rather than reactive measures.

3. Baseline

LOCAL & REGIONAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES POLICY

Revised Statutory Direction for Halton Children's Services (February 2025)

A revised statutory direction was issued by the Department for Education (DfE) in February 2025 after an inadequate Ofsted inspection. This required Halton Borough Council (HBC) to continue to work with a DfE Children's Services Improvement Advisor and make improvements across children's social care. This statutory direction shapes local authority governance, accountability, improvement planning and how services operate across safeguarding, assessment and intervention.

Halton Children and Young People's Partnership Plan (2024-2027)

Halton's overarching strategic plan for children and young people sets out local priorities, needs assessments and agreed actions across partners (local authority, health, education, police, voluntary sector). This includes a shared vision, sets priority areas that drive commissioning, service design and performance monitoring, and guides collective action across early years, education, health, social care, youth services, families and SEND. This plan underpins local policy decisions and resource allocation, ensuring that services across the borough work collaboratively on agreed objectives.

Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) Multi-Agency Arrangements (2023)

Under Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023), Halton's safeguarding partners (HBC, Cheshire Merseyside ICB, and Cheshire Constabulary) jointly define how agencies work together to protect children. This sets out how safeguarding concerns are identified, assessed and responded to; clarifies roles and responsibilities across agencies; and includes quality assurance, learning reviews and joint planning. It operationalises how children at risk of harm are protected in Halton, shaping multi-agency working culture and procedures.

Pan-Cheshire & Halton Safeguarding Procedures (June 2025)

The Pan-Cheshire & Halton online safeguarding procedures detail frontline practice on topics such as responding to abuse, thresholds for referrals, assessments and multi-agency planning. Changes in June 2025 ensure alignment with national guidance.

Cheshire & Merseyside Children & Young People's Mental Health Plan (2024-26)

Delivered by NHS Cheshire & Merseyside Integrated Care Board, this plan outlines priorities and coordinated work across the region to support child and adolescent mental health. It integrates local need into a broader strategy, building on system-wide engagement in 2024. Halton Children's Services work with health partners under this plan to improve mental health support pathways, early help and crisis responses.

Family Hubs and Start for Life Implementation (2024-25)

Halton has been recognised for strong progress in rolling out Family Hubs, bringing together health visiting, parenting support, early years, mental health and family services in accessible community settings. Several Hubs provide non-stigmatising support for families from pregnancy onwards and integrated services including health, early education, SEND support, housing, mental health, debt advice and youth services. The programme has received national funding to support delivery.

Halton Strategy for Children in Care & Care Leavers (2023-26)

This strategy sets out how HBC and partner agencies will work together over a 3-year period to improve outcomes for children in care and care leavers, ensuring they will have the same opportunities as their peers and can reach their full potential. Key principles include being child-centred and rights-based, multi-agency partnership working and having a focus on permanence and stability.

3. Baseline

LOCAL & REGIONAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES POLICY cont.

Halton Placement Sufficiency Strategy (2025-28)

This sets out how HBC will meet its statutory duty to secure sufficient, suitable accommodation and placements for children looked after and care leavers who cannot safely remain at home. This strategy drives commissioning, planning and partnership activity to improve placement availability and outcomes for these children.

The core aims and outcomes of the strategy are:

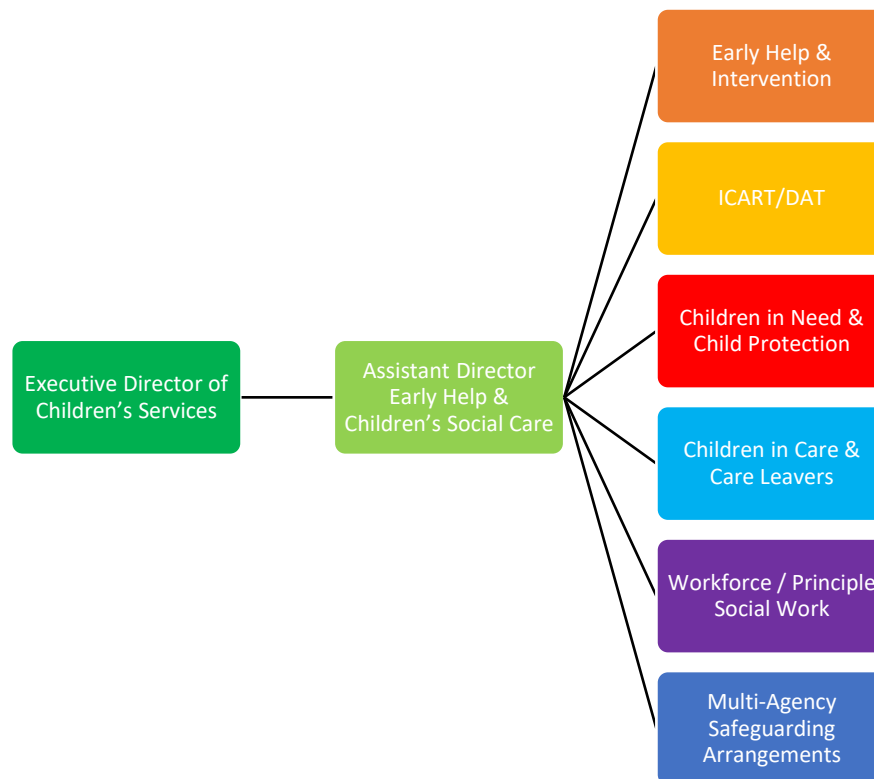
- Permeance & Stability – promote family-based placements through fostering, kinship care, special guardianship or adoption and ensure permanency planning starts early and informs placement decisions.
- Local Provision – increase local placement sufficiency so that children are cared for near home and reduce the need for children to be placed far away, improving contact with family/friends and continuity in education and community.
- Range of Accommodation Options – strengthen accommodation options for older young people (16/17+), including supported lodgings and semi-independent living to meet diverse needs, and ensure sufficiency in in-borough placements and appropriate out-of-borough options where necessary.
- Commissioning & Partnership Working – Use data, commissioning and strategic partnerships to plan and shape the local placement market, work with providers to develop the range of placements needed (e.g. foster care, supported accommodation, therapeutic provision), and seek better outcomes while managing costs and quality standards.
- Care Planning – improve care planning processes, ensuring clarity about placement needs from the outset, and better align with commissioning strategy and provider availability.

CURRENT DELIVERY MODEL

The diagram below sets out the current delivery model for Children's Services at Halton Borough Council (HBC).

The service is led by the Executive Director of Children's Services. The Assistant Director of Early Help & Children's Social Care reports to the Executive Director, and has a team of 4: a Designated Social Care Officer, a Social Care Improvement Lead and 2 Resourcing Officers.

Figure 3.1 HBC Children's Social Care Organisation Structure



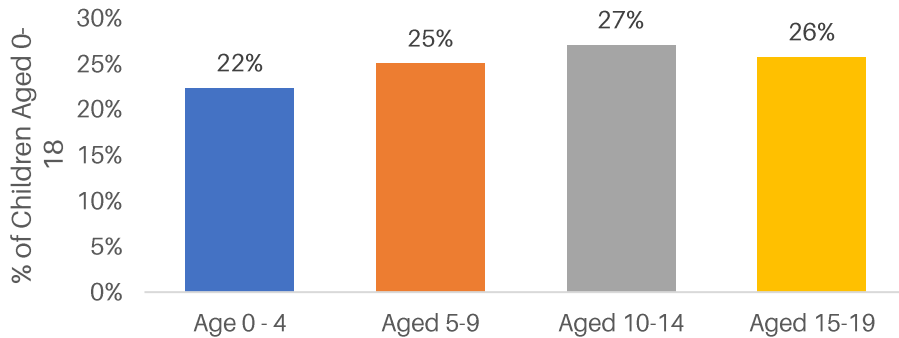
3. Baseline

AGE PROFILE

Latest figures by the ONS for 2024 show that there are 29,395 children aged 0-18 in Halton. This is equivalent to 22% of the total population, which is in line with the regional and national average.

There are 8,268 children aged 10-14 in Halton, equivalent to 27% of the population aged 0-19. This is the largest age group, followed by 15-19 (7,885; 26%), 5-9 (7,663; 25%). The smallest age group is age 0-4 is made up of 6,829 children (22%). This is broadly in line with regional and national averages.

Figure 3.1 Children in Halton by Age Group (2024)

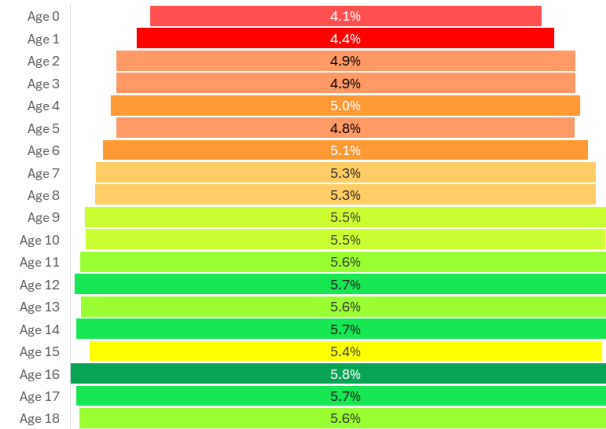


Source: ONS

Breaking these figures in single year age bands, there is a divide in the proportion of children aged 0-18 from age 9, with there being a higher proportion of children aged 9+ than below. This implies that there is a declining population of children expected to move through the borough over the next decade.

Figure 3.2 shows the change in children aged 0-18 by age group over the last 20 years. There are 1,230 less children in Halton in total since 2004 (-4%), but only 195 less since 2014 (-1%).

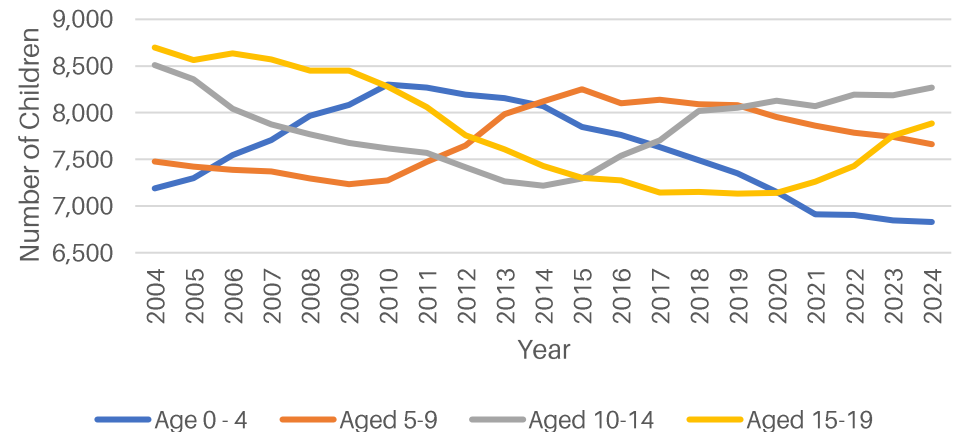
Figure 3.2 Children in Halton by Single Year of Age as a % of Children Aged 0-18 (2024)



Source: ONS

Figure 3.3 shows the change in children aged 0-18 by age group over the last 20 years. There are 1,230 less children in Halton in total since 2004 (-4%), but only 195 less since 2014 (-1%).

Figure 3.3 Change in Number of Children by Age Group (2004-2024)



3. Baseline

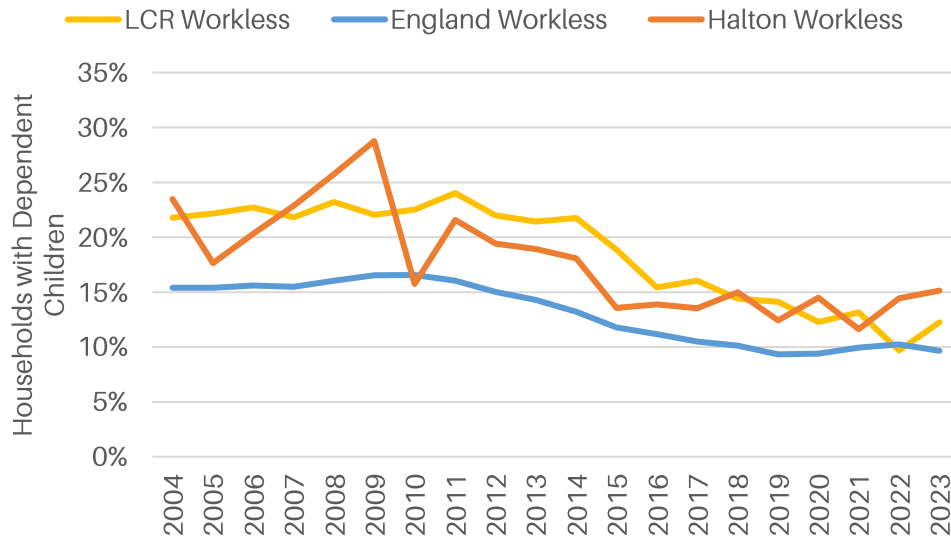
AGE PROFILE cont.

The number of children aged 0-4 has had the most significant decreasing trend, decreasing by 1,441 children (17%) since 2011 and remains on a downward trend. The number of children aged 5-9 has been falling since 2015 (8%), after a period of growth since 2009. The number of children aged 10-14 has grown by 14% since 2014, making it now the largest age group, while children aged 15-19 began growing in 2017 (9%), following a 10-year period of decline.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

In Halton, there are around 1.8 dependent children per household. This is also true for both lone parents and couples. The number of dependent children per household is showing an increasing trend since 2021.

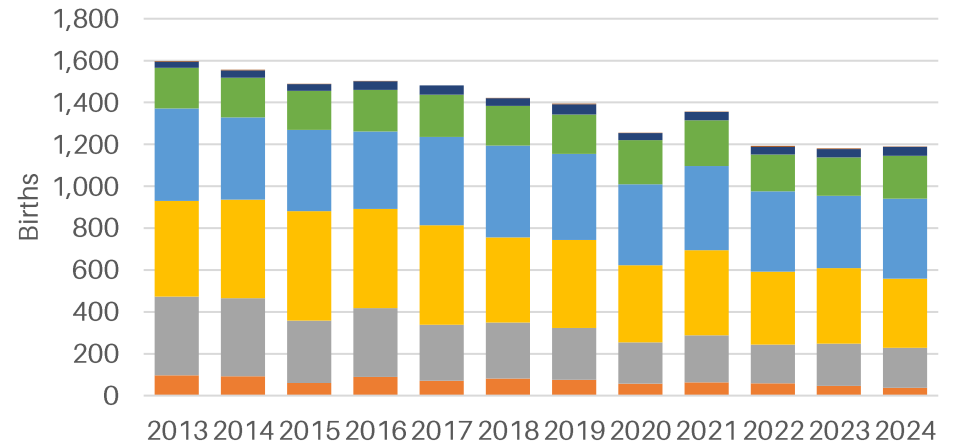
Figure 3.5 Workless Households with Dependent Children (2004-2023)



Source: ONS

Children living in workless households is often a key factor in families ending up in difficulties that result in requiring support from Children's Services. In 2023, there were 3,800 workless households in Halton with dependent children. This is equivalent to 15% of all households with dependent children. Despite a reduction of 1,500 workless households with dependent children in 2013, a recent increase since 2021 means that a higher proportion of households with dependent children are workless than the regional and national average.

Figure 3.6 Birth Age of Mothers (2013-2024)



Source: ONS

In 2024, there were 1,190 births in Halton. This is below the average annual number of births over the last decade (1,385 births), with births following a decreasing trend over the period. 3.2% of mothers in Halton were aged under 20 in 2024, equivalent to 38 births. Whilst this is down from 6.1% in 2013 when there were 97 births, this is higher than the average in Liverpool City Region (LCR) and in England. A high proportion of young mothers can often put a higher pressure on Children's Services due to reasons such as increased social and economic needs, higher health and wellbeing risks, parenting and safeguarding challenges and multi-agency demand.

3. Baseline

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS cont.

According to the latest ONS Indices of Multiple Deprivation, Halton is more deprived than 81% of local authority districts in England.

Deprivation is highest in the borough in Health and Disability (more deprived than 93%), Employment (more deprived than 86%), and Crime (more deprived than 81%). Halton is also within the 40% most deprived local authorities for Income and Education.

Central Halton is generally more deprived, across both Widnes and Runcorn. Some areas in the outskirts of the borough, however, are some of the least deprived in the country.

Figure 3.8 shows the outcome of comparing Halton to its statistical neighbours using a benchmarking tool. Halton has relatively low home ownership, high deprivation and high numbers of single family households. However, there are low levels of disability, low levels of free school meals, low unemployment and high qualifications.

Figure 3.7 Halton Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2025)

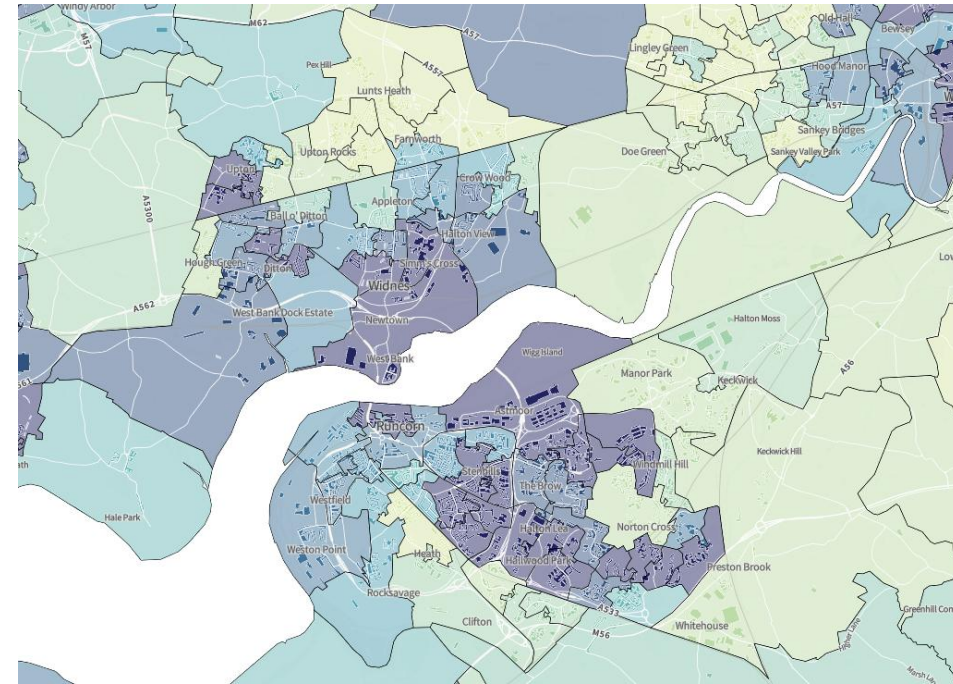


Figure 3.8 Children's Services Statistical Neighbour Benchmarking Tool

la_name	Year 6 Obese or overweight	% of Infants Taking Free School Meals	% of households with dep. children deprived in 1 dimension	% of households with dep. children deprived in 3 dimensions	% of households with dep. children where 0 persons are disabled whose day-to-day activities are limited	% of households with dep. children where 1 or more adults are employed	% of households with dep. children where 1 or more persons have a non-limiting long-term physical or mental health condition	% of households with a single family dep. Child	% of households where the property is owned (outright or with a mortgage)	% of HRP of working age who are unemployed but have worked in the past 12 months	% of HRP of working age who have no qualification	% of usual residents with religion - Christian
Barnsley	40.0	33.9	29.9	3.8	86.0	83.3	16.3	25.4	62.8	3.2	15.1	51.3
County Durham	39.8	32.2	29.6	2.8	85.9	81.5	17.2	23.9	62.8	3.7	12.9	54.6
Gateshead	41.4	32.0	29.8	3.4	87.3	81.9	16.7	23.6	58.4	3.5	13.6	50.8
Halton	40.3	30.7	29.9	3.5	85.2	82.1	15.6	26.7	61.2	3.4	12.1	58.6
Redcar and Cleveland	40.1	31.6	30.0	3.1	85.4	80.1	16.8	24.1	65.2	3.9	14.9	53.0
Rotherham	41.1	30.4	30.2	3.5	86.2	83.2	16.3	26.3	64.0	3.5	15.1	49.0
Sefton	38.4	32.7	29.4	2.6	85.6	85.6	16.1	23.1	67.3	3.5	13.1	64.4
St Helens	44.0	32.4	29.5	3.2	85.1	82.8	16.7	25.2	65.0	3.2	13.5	62.3
Stockton-on-Tees	42.0	28.8	28.2	2.7	86.8	84.2	17.0	27.3	66.6	3.6	13.4	51.1
Sunderland	45.0	32.1	31.6	3.4	84.7	80.6	16.5	24.8	58.5	3.7	14.4	53.2
Wirral	36.7	34.2	29.3	2.5	84.2	83.4	16.7	24.8	65.6	3.6	11.9	55.0

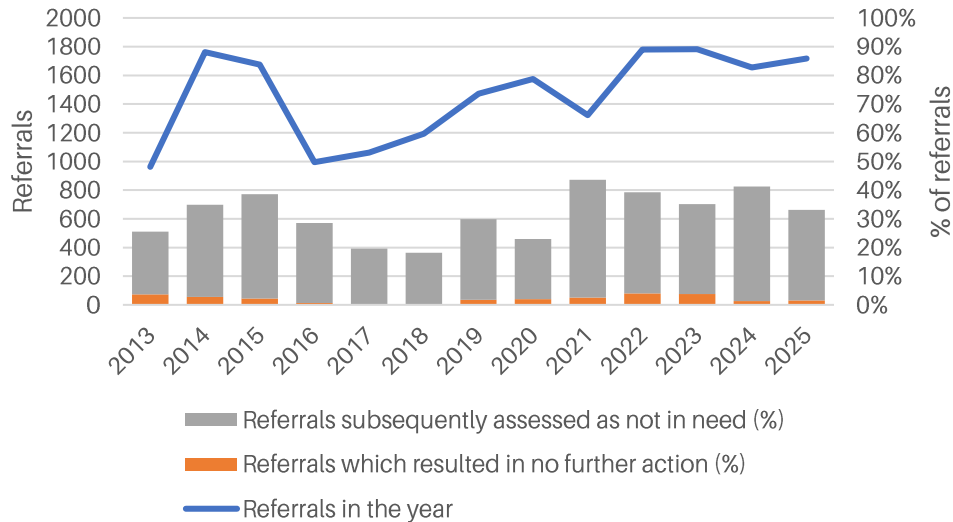
3. Baseline

REFERRALS

Figure 3.9 presents the number of referrals to social services over the last decade. This shows that referrals have increased slightly since 2015 to 1,717, a 3% increase (43 more cases). However, following 2015, there was a sharp drop in referrals of 40%. Since then, referrals have been mostly rising year-on-year, until they levelled out in 2022.

However, the proportion of referrals that are subsequently assessed as either not in need or no further action required is higher in the last 6 years than previous years.

Figure 3.9 Referrals to Social Services (2013-2025)

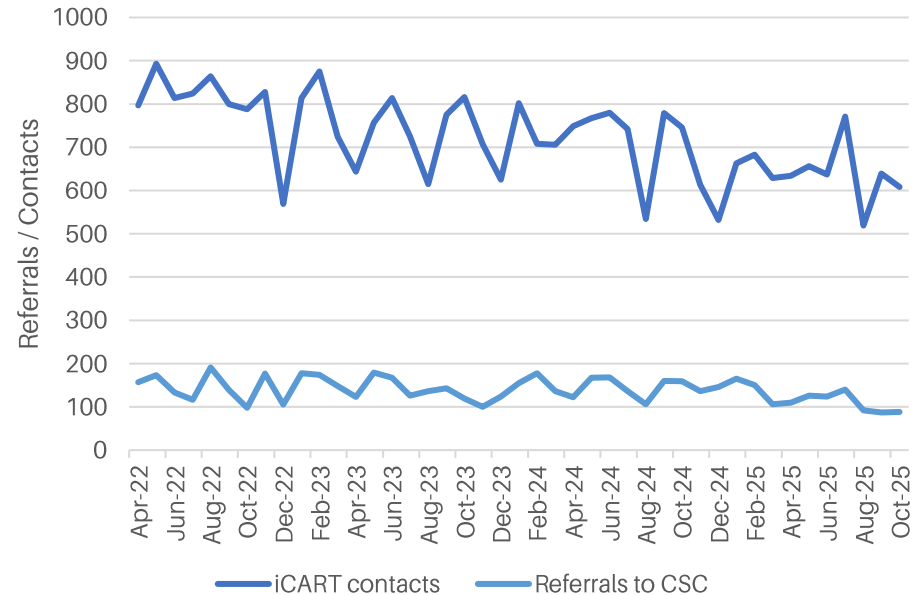


Source: DfE

The most frequent source of referrals in Halton in 2025 was the police, accounting for 35% of referrals. Before 2022, local authorities used to be the next most frequent source. However, local authority referrals have since reduced and now a large amount come through from schools (18%). Health services are also a significant source for referrals.

Figure 3.10 shows the number of contacts to ICART between April 2022 to October 2025. In the year to date, there were 7,584 contacts to the local authority referral service. This has followed a downward linear trend since April 2022. Referrals to Children’s Social Care have also been on a generally downward trend, despite fluctuations in some months during the period.

Figure 3.10 Halton Children’s Services Pathways (April 2022-October 2025)



Source: HBC

3. Baseline

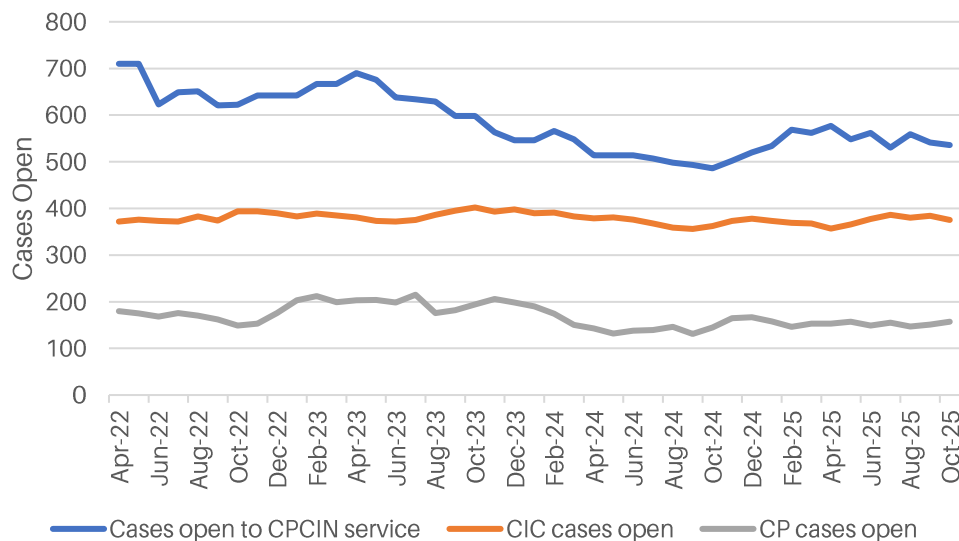
CASES OPEN

Figure 3.11 presents the number of cases open each month across different Children’s Services in Halton since April 2022. In October 2025, there were 536 cases open to the Child Protection and Child in Need (CPCIN) service. This has followed a downward trend since April 2022, when there were 710 open cases.

29% of CPCIN cases open in October 2025 were Child Protection cases. The number of Child Protection cases has been following a relatively downward trend for the last 2 years, following higher numbers during 2023.

In October 2025, there were 375 Child in Care cases open in Halton. This is only 2 more cases than in April 2022 and there has only been minor monthly fluctuation over the period.

Figure 3.11 Halton Children’s Services Cases Open (April 2022-October 2025)

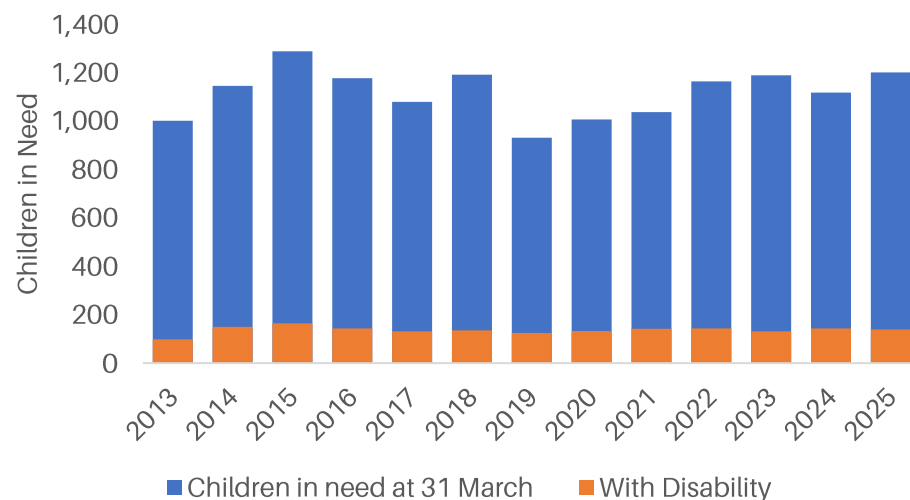


CHILDREN IN NEED

In the year to March 2025, there were 1,201 Children in Need in Halton. This is 88 less children (-7%) than in 2015. However, 2015 was a year that experiences a spike in cases, which was followed by a generally downward trend, and this has then been rising since 2019 (+270 children).

Also in the year to March 2025, there were 12% of Children in Need that had a disability, equivalent to 140 children. This is 24 less children than in 2015, a decrease of 15%.

Figure 3.12 Halton Children in Need (2013-2025)



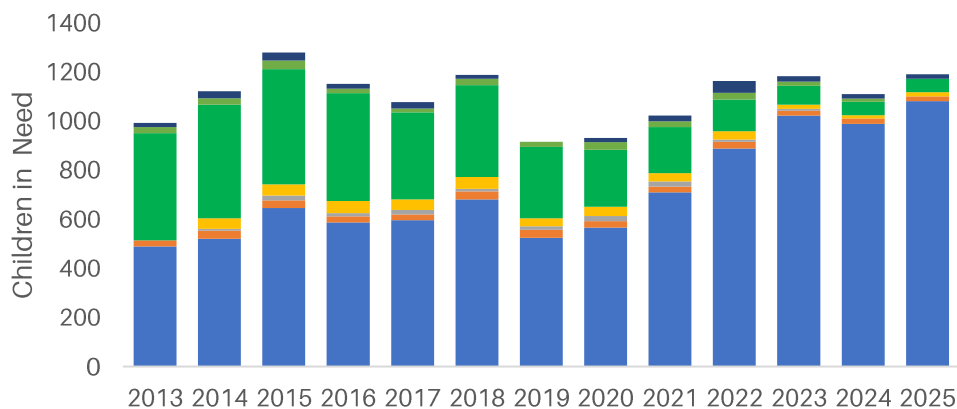
3. Baseline

CHILDREN IN NEED cont.

1,082 of the Children in Need in Halton in the year to March 2025, were registered as a child in need due to reason N1 Abuse or Neglect – the most severe reason for a child to be in need. This represents 90% of all Children in Need.

Not only has the number of children that are in need due to abuse or neglect increased dramatically over the last decade, but the proportion of cases that are classified as N1 have significantly increased. In previous years, it was much more common for cases to involve reason N5, Family Dysfunction, than current figures show.

Figure 3.13 Halton Children in Need by Reason (2013-2025)

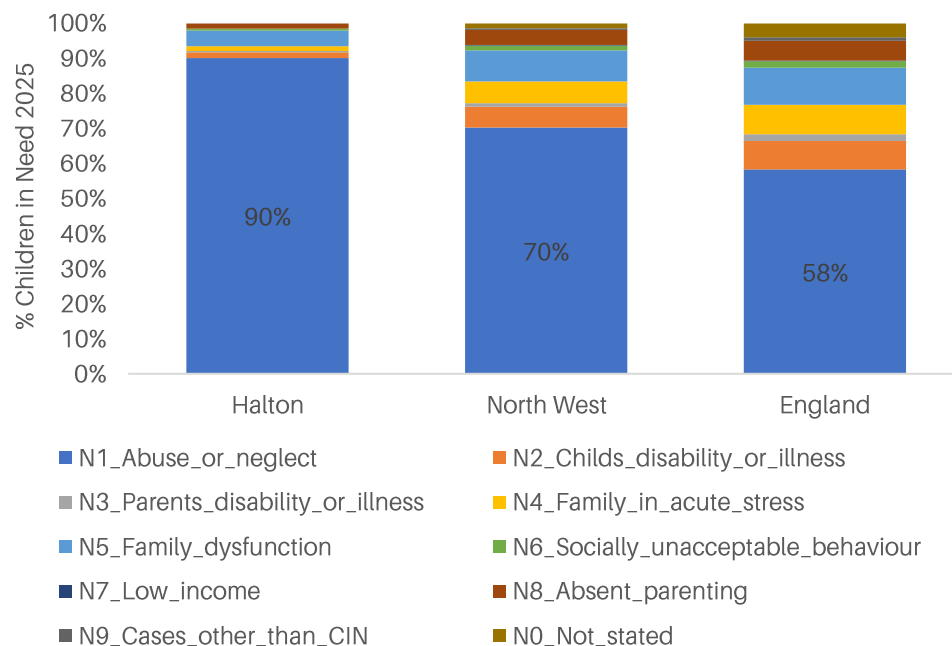


- N1 - Abuse or neglect
- N2 - Child's disability or illness
- N3 - Parent's disability or illness
- N4 - Family in acute stress
- N5 - Family dysfunction
- N6 - Socially unacceptable behaviour
- N8 - Absent parenting

Source: DfE

When comparing this data to regional and national averages, the difference in primary type of need is significant. The proportion of Children in Need cases that involve abuse or neglect far outweigh what is seen in the North West and England, and there are much lower proportions of all other type of need.

Figure 3.14 Children in Need by Primary Type of Need (2025)



Source: DfE

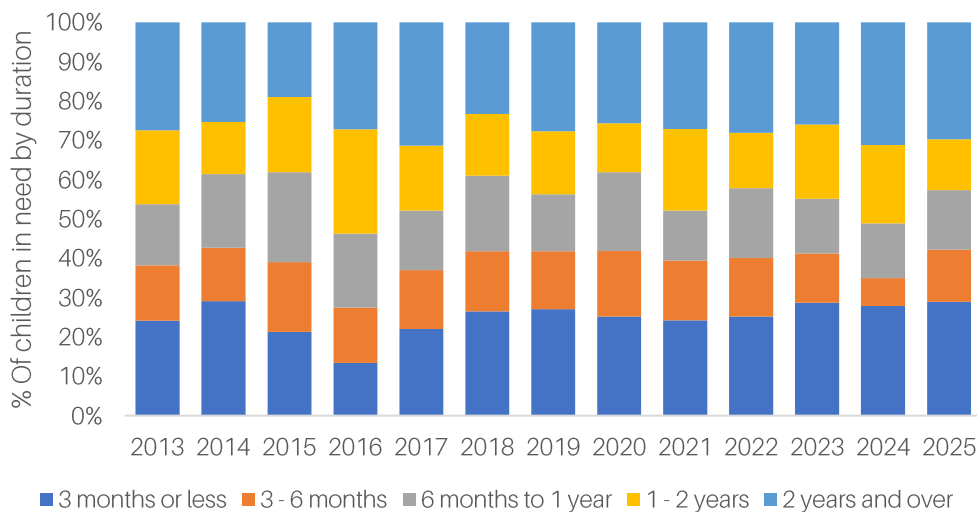
Furthermore, 4.2% of all children in Halton were registered as a Child in Need in the year to March 2025. This has increased from 3.6% of children in 2021. Over this period, there has been a consistently higher proportion of Children in Need in Halton than regional and national averages. In 2025, this was 3.7% of children in the North West and 3.2% of all children across England.

3. Baseline

CHILDREN IN NEED cont.

In 2025, nearly a 3rd of Children in Need cases were dealt with quickly (29% within 3 months or less). However, nearly a 3rd of cases took over 2 years to be dealt with. This is due to risking complexity and nationally recognised challenges in social work. The number of cases lasting more than 2 years has grown by 112 (46%) since 2015. Meanwhile, the number of cases between 3 months and 2 years is decreasing. This suggests that if an issue is not resolved early, there is potential for it to become a persistent area of need.

Figure 3.15 Halton Children in Need by Duration of Case (2013-2025)

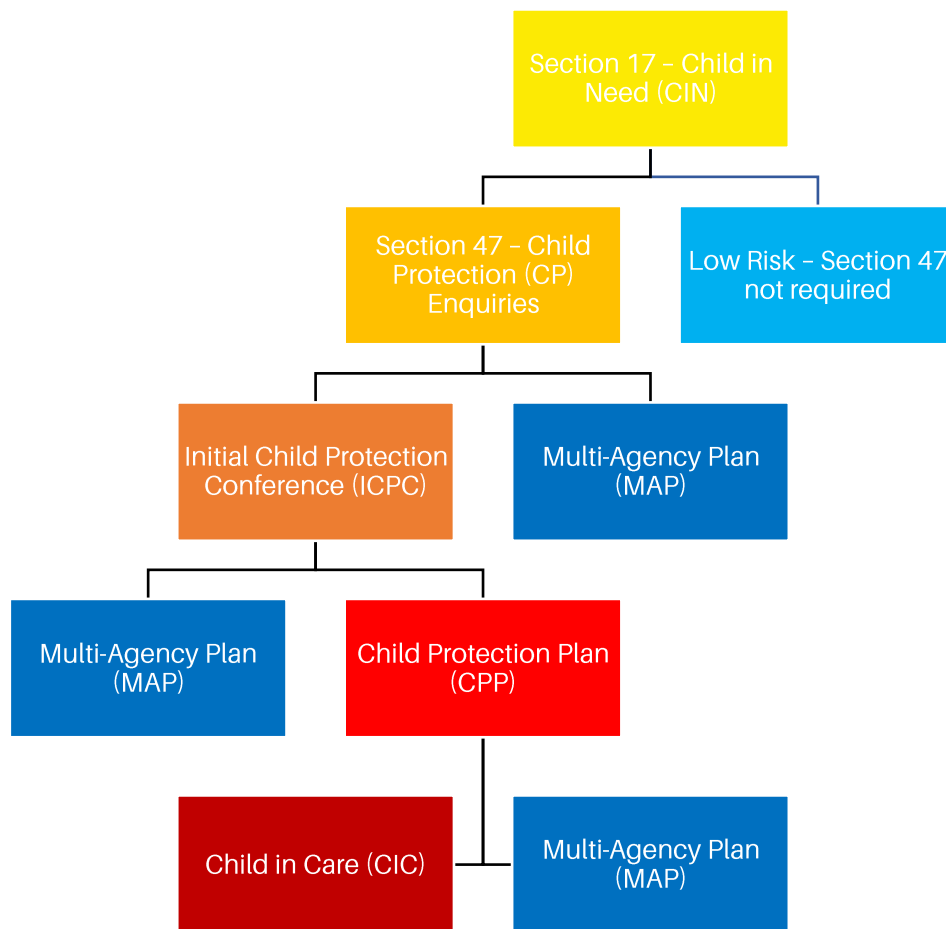


Source: DfE

CHILD IN NEED PATHWAY

The diagram below sets out the pathway through Children's Services once a child is identified as a Child in Need under Section 17.

Figure 3.16 Pathway Through Children's Services



3. Baseline

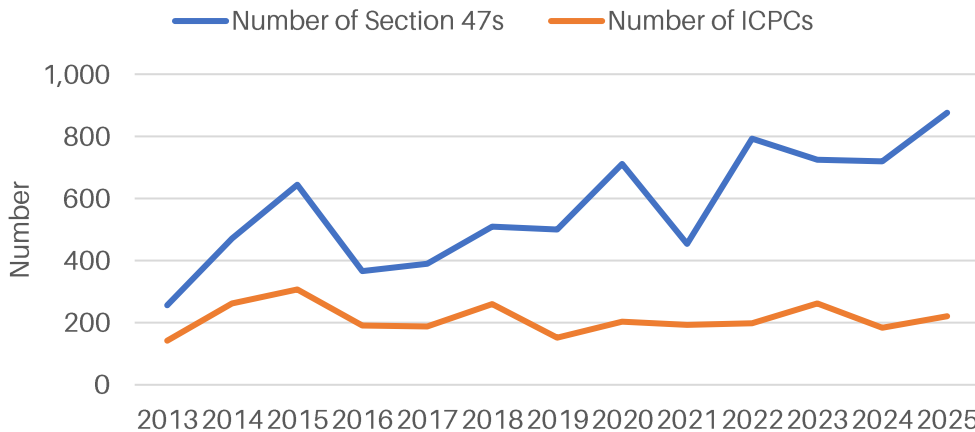
CHILD IN NEED PATHWAYS cont.

Section 47's and ICPC's

A Section 47 enquiry occurs after a Child in Need is identified of being at significant risk of harm. This triggers Children's Social Care to undertake enquiries to assess the risk. In 2025, there were 876 Section 47's. This has generally been following an increasing trend. There were 230 more Section 47's in 2025 compared to 2025 (36% increase). However, there was a spike in 2015. Compared to 2016, there were 510 more Section 47s, and increase of 139%.

If a Section 47 enquiry confirms that there is a significant risk of harm, there will then be an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC). This brings together all key professionals and the family to consider whether a child needs a Child Protection Plan. In 2025, there were 221 ICPC's. This is 25% of Section 47 enquires. Over the last decade, the trend in the number of ICPCs has remained fairly stable. Therefore, while Section 47's are increasing, the proportion of these enquiries that result in ICPCs is reducing. For example, in 2016 51% of Section 47's became ICPCs.

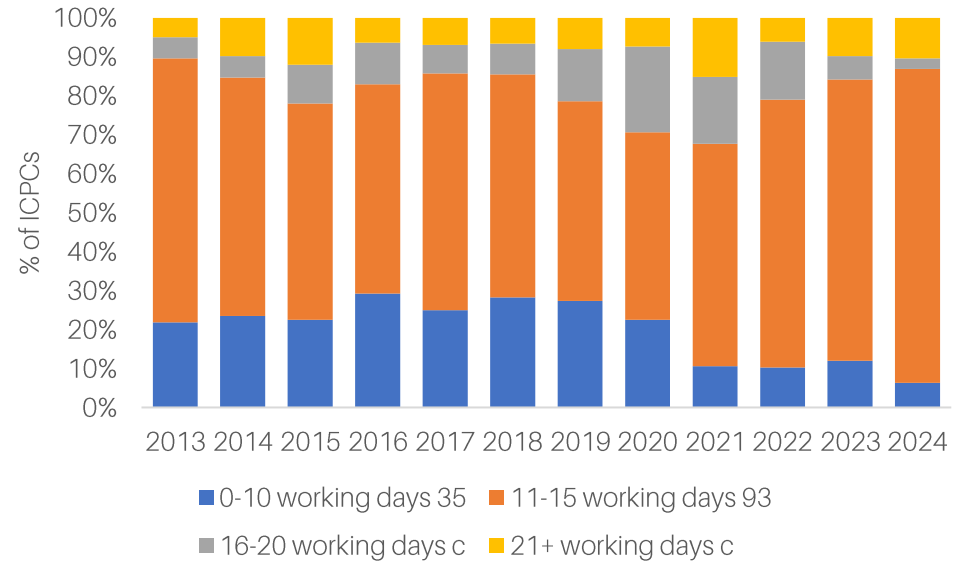
Figure 3.17 Halton Section 47's and ICPC's (2013-2025)



Source: DfE

Section 47 enquiries and ICPC's are taking longer in the last 4 years than they have done in the years prior. The average duration between the start of an S47 and ICPC has increased from 12 to 14 days. In 2025, only 6% of ICPCs were dealt within 0-10 working days. Over 10% took over 21 working days.

Figure 3.18 Duration of ICPCs



Source: DfE

3. Baseline

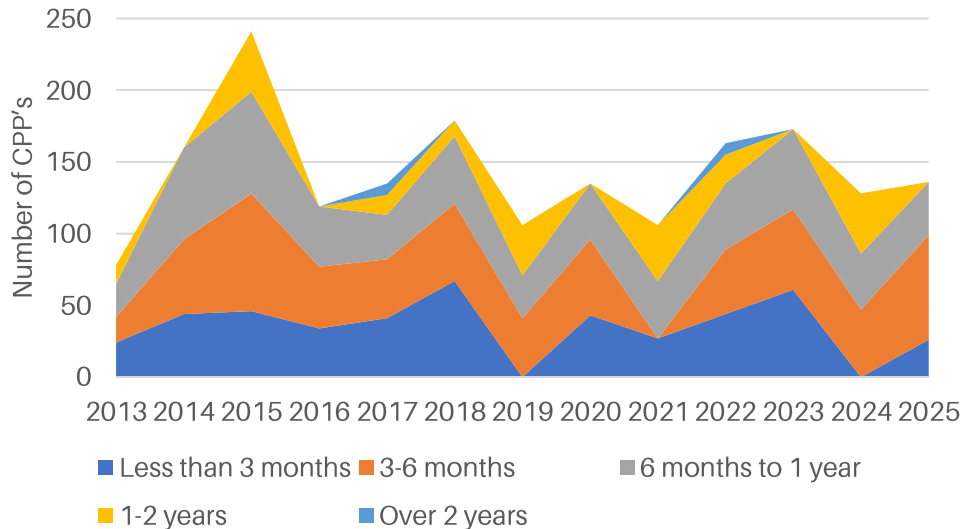
CHILD IN NEED PATHWAYS cont.

Child Protection Plans

If the threshold for significant harm is met, ICPC's will result in the recommendation of a Child Protection Plan (CPP). This involves agreeing actions for parents, professionals and the child, assigning responsibilities of each agency and setting timescales for review and follow up.

In 2025, there were 153 children with CPP's. This is a decrease of 88 since 2015 (-37%). However, 2015 was a year where there was a significant spike. The number of children with CPP's has fluctuated over the last years. There has been a decrease since 2022 / 2023. Of these, the majority (65%) last less than 6 months, with very few lasting over 1 year.

Figure 3.19 Halton Child Protection Plans (2013-2025)



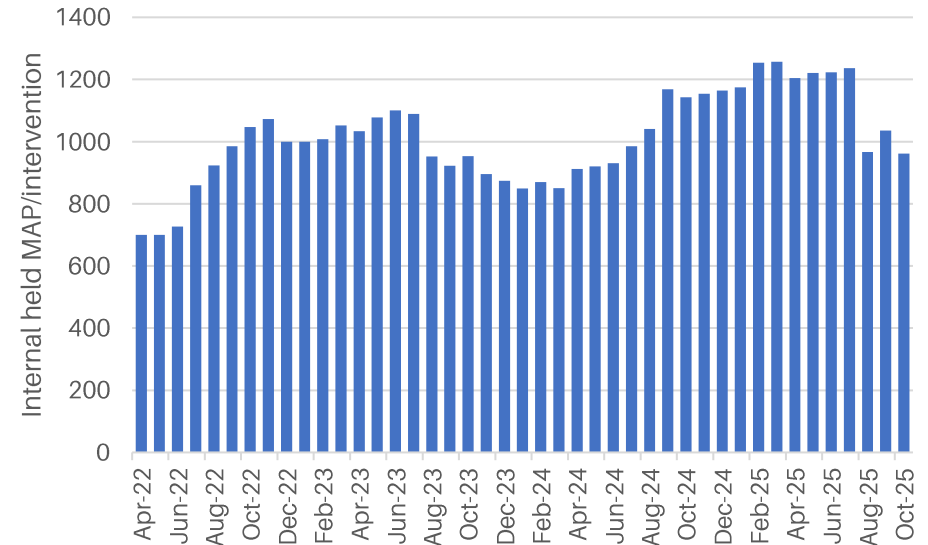
Source: DfE

Multi-Agency Plans

Multi-Agency Plans (MAPs) can be recommended in cases where a Child in Need is identified as being at lower risk of significant harm. This plan supports the child's development and wellbeing, and addresses needs early before they escalate into serious harm. The plan will coordinate services from education, health, social care and other agencies and is led by a social worker.

As of October 2025, there were 962 internally held MAPs/interventions. This dropped below 1,000 in August 2025 for the first time in over a year, since which the number had been steadily increasing. Number of MAPS/interventions is higher than the number of CINCP cases open because children can be on multiple plans and some short-term interventions may not be tied to a formal CIN case.

Figure 3.20 Halton Internal Held MAP/Intervention



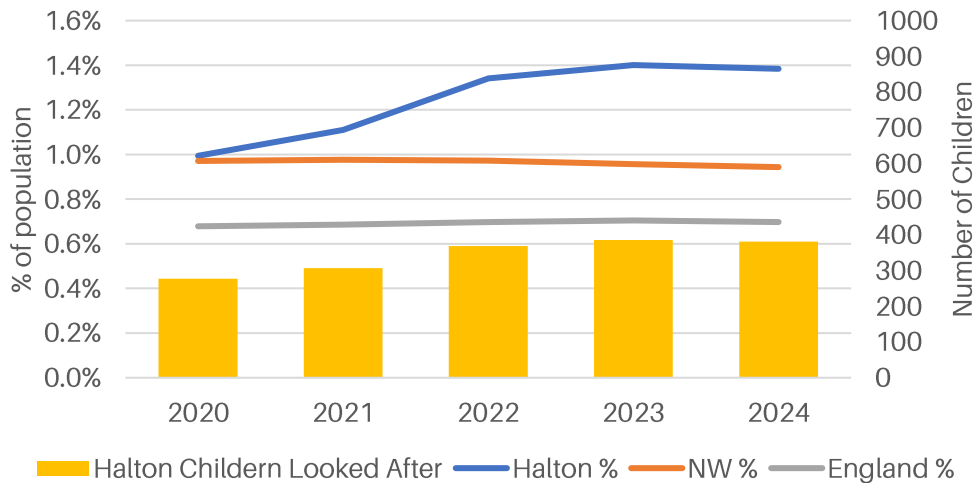
Source: HBC

3. Baseline

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

Most recent figures for 2024 show that there are 381 children looked after in Halton. This is equivalent to 1.4% of the population. This is higher than regional and national averages, there less than 1% of the population are Children Looked After.

Figure 3.21 Children Looked After in Halton (2020-2024)



Source: DfE

There were 26 more Children Looked After in Halton in 2024 than in 2020. This represents growth of 38% and has been increasing year-on-year.

Age of Children Looked After

39% of the Children Looked After in Halton in 2024 were aged 10-15 (147 children). This is in line with regional and national averages. 17% of children were aged 1-4, 20% aged 5-9 and 19% 16+. The age profile for Children Looked After has remained mostly unchanged over a 5 year period.

Reason for Being a Child Looked After

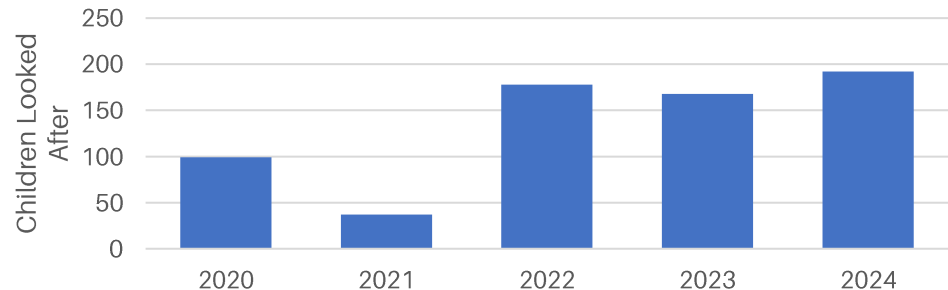
72% of the Children Looked after in Halton in 2024 were being looked after due to abuse or neglect (274 children). Whilst this is below regional averages, it is above the national average of 66%. 50 children (13%) were being looked after due to family dysfunction, 20 due to acute family stress (5%), 25 due to absent parenting (7%) and 6 due to socially unacceptable behaviour (2%). 6 children were being looked after due to either the child's disability or parental illness/disability.

Location of Care

80% of Children Looked After were placed 20 miles or less from home and 56 were placed further than this. However, as Halton is a small local authority, this could still mean that children are placed outside of borough even if they are within the 20 mile range.

We know that at least 188 Children Looked After (49%) were placed within the local authority boundary, 20 miles or less from home, and we know that 115 children (30%) were placed outside of the local authority boundary but still within 20 miles or less from home. We also know that 56 children (15%) were placed outside of local authority boundaries more than 20 miles from home. For some children distance was not recorded. However, we know that 192 children (50%) were placed outside of Halton in 2024. This exceeds the national average of 45%.

Figure 3.22 Children Looked After Placed Outside of Halton (2020-2024)

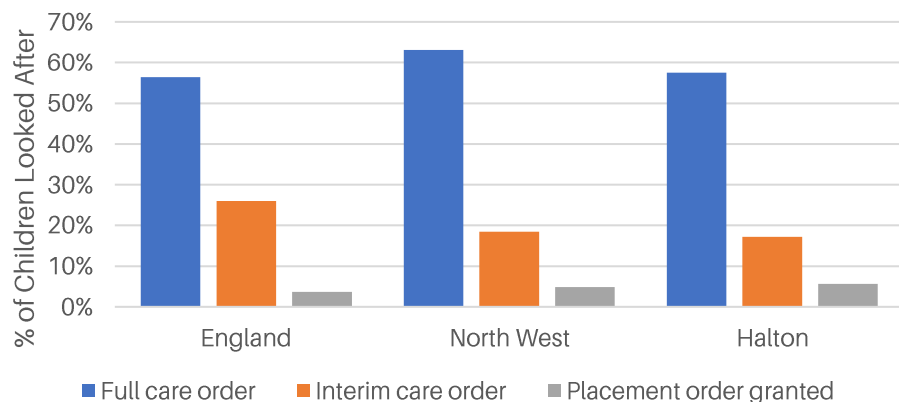


3. Baseline

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER cont.

In 2024, 215 Children Looked After in Halton were placed under a Full Care Order (56%), 99 children were placed under an Interim Care Order (26%) and 14 children had a Placement Order Granted (4%). Though slightly higher than the national average, a lower proportion of Children Looked After were placed under Full Care Orders than in the North West.

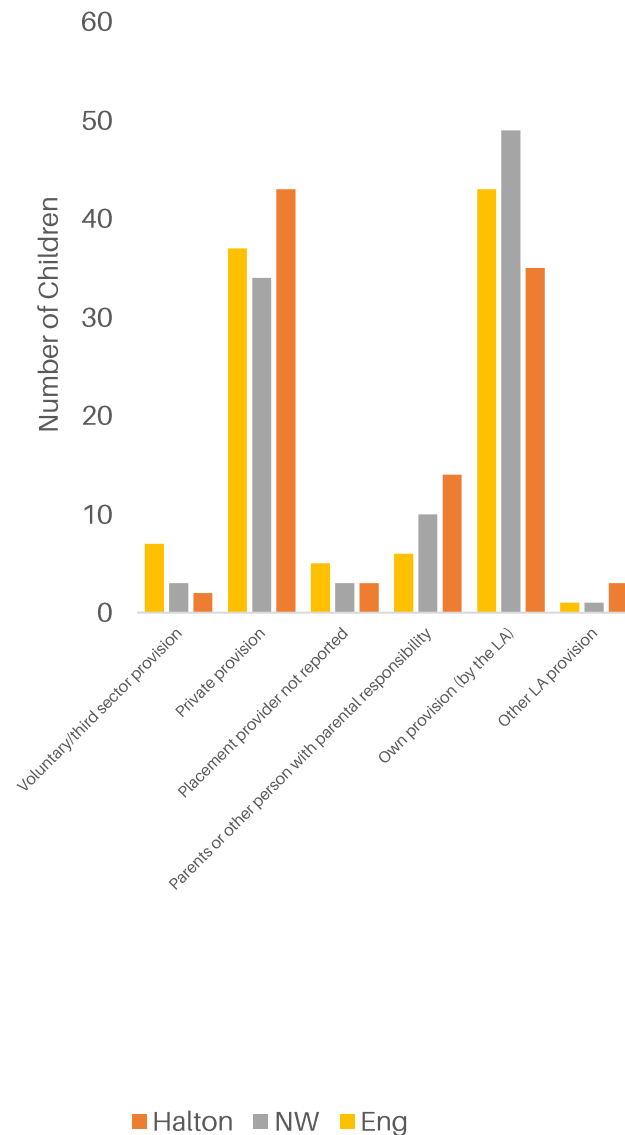
Figure 3.23 Children Looked After by Level of Care (2024)



Source: DfE

43% of Children Looked After were placed in private provision in 2024 (165 children). This is higher than the regional and national average. Halton also has much lower local authority provision than regional and national averages, providing for just 35% of Children Looked After. 14% of children were placed with parents or another person with parental responsibility which is higher than average. 11 children were placed in other local authority provision, and 7 children were placed in voluntary/3rd sector provision. In comparison, in 2020 35% of children were placed in private provision in Halton (96 children) and 50% were placed in the local authority's own provision (138 children). This is an increase of 69 children being placed in privately provided care within 5 years.

Figure 3.24 Children Looked After by Provider (2024)



3. Baseline

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER cont.

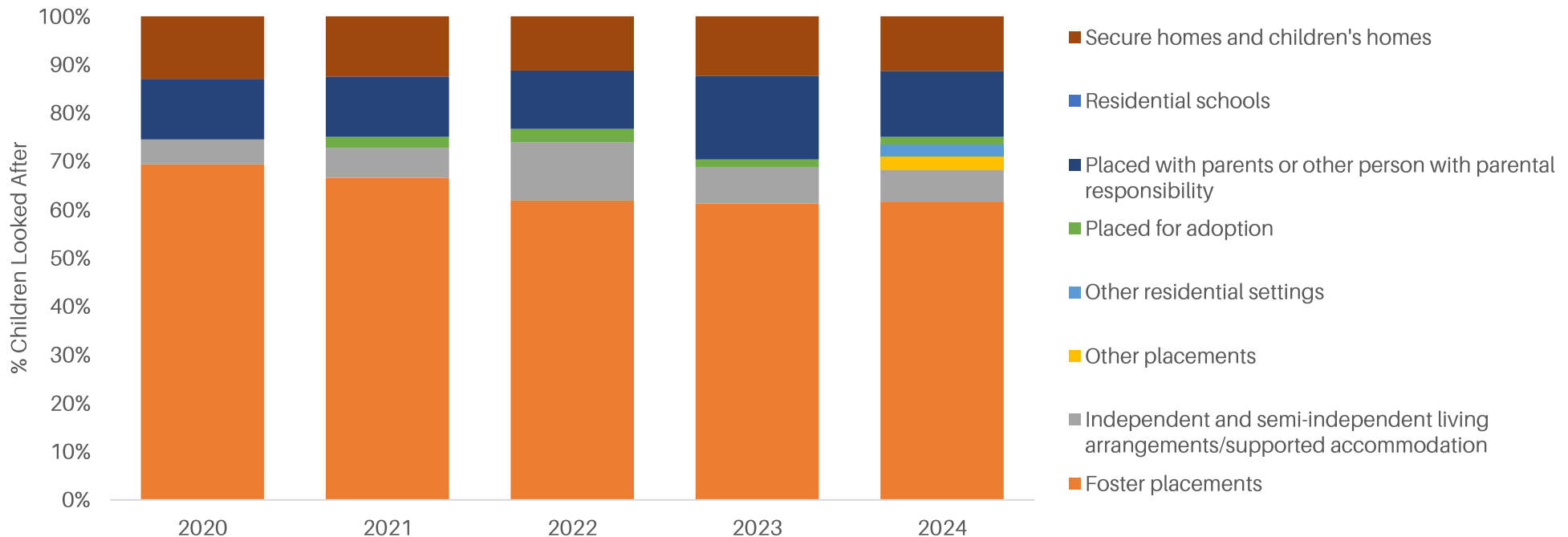
Figure 3.25 shows the proportion of Children Looked After by type of placement.

In 2024, 235 children in Halton were placed in foster care (62%). This is lower than the regional and national average (66% and 67% respectively). The proportion of Children Looked After going into foster care in Halton has been decreasing since 2020. 53 children (14%) were placed with parents or another person with parental responsibility.

43 children were placed in secure homes and children's homes (11%). This is higher than the regional and national averages of 10%. Only 6 children were placed for adoption (2%). 25 children were placed in independent and semi-independent living arrangements (7%). 11 children were placed in other placements (3%) and 9 children were placed in other residential settings (2%).

6% of children looked after were unaccompanied asylum seeker children. This is below the national average.

Figure 3.25 Halton Children Looked After by Type of Placement



3. Baseline

BASELINE DEMAND FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN HALTON

The table below outlines all of the key measures that assess the current demand for Children's Services in Halton.

Over a 10-year period, referrals to Children's Services have increased by 73%. This has only translated into a 2% increase in the number of Children in Need.

However, there has been an 84% increase in the number of children that are in need due to the most serious reason of abuse and neglect. This has resulted in a 139% increase in Section 47 enquiries. The increase in ICPCs and CPPs is lower but significant.

1.3% of children in Halton are currently Children Looked After. This has grown by 38% in 5 years. In the same period, there has been a 94% increase in the number of children placed outside of Halton, a 72% increase in children placed in private care provision and a 2% decrease in children placed in local authority provision. Whilst foster placements increasing by 25% is positive, this is more to do with an increase in Children Looked After rather than a wider use of fostering, as the number of children placed in secure homes and children's homes has also increased by 23%.

Table 3.1 Summary of Baseline Demand for Children's Services in Halton

	Current No.	Year	% of Children in Halton	Trend	Trend Years
Referrals	1717	2025	5.8%	73%	2016-2025
Children in Need	1201	2025	4.1%	2%	2016-2025
Child in Need Due to N1 - Abuse or Neglect	1082	2025	3.7%	84%	2016-2025
Section 47	876	2025	3.0%	139%	2016-2025
ICPC	221	2025	0.8%	16%	2016-2025
CPP	153	2025	0.5%	7%	2016-2025
Children Looked After	381	2024	1.3%	38%	2020-2024
Children Placed Outside of Halton	192	2024	0.7%	94%	2020-2024
Children with Full Care Order	215	2024	0.7%	13%	2020-2024
Children Placed in Private Provision	165	2024	0.6%	72%	2020-2024
Children Placed in LA Provision	135	2024	0.5%	-2%	2020-2024
Foster Placements	235	2024	0.8%	25%	2020-2024
Children Placed in Secure Homes & Children's Home	43	2024	0.1%	23%	2020-2024

An aerial photograph of a park area. In the foreground, there is a large green lawn with a dirt path. A winding lake or canal runs through the middle ground, with several boats docked along its edge. The background shows a dense line of trees and a city skyline with industrial buildings and cooling towers under a clear sky.

4. Service Requirements

4. Supply & Demand

INTRODUCTION

This section considers the existing supply of children's services and accommodation including a review and mapping of service spaces, identifying number, type, location, size, age and quality of space. It also considers the key issues or service delivery challenges, and costs associated with space provision.

We then consider the demand drivers for future services including assessment of population growth and identify potential gaps in current service assets to meet future needs and highlighting of priorities.

Finally, this section identifies service requirements and informed by stakeholder engagement.

EXISTING CHILDREN'S SERVICES ASSETS IN HALTON

The following map illustrates the existing Children's Services assets used by Halton Borough Council (HBC). The details of these are as follows:

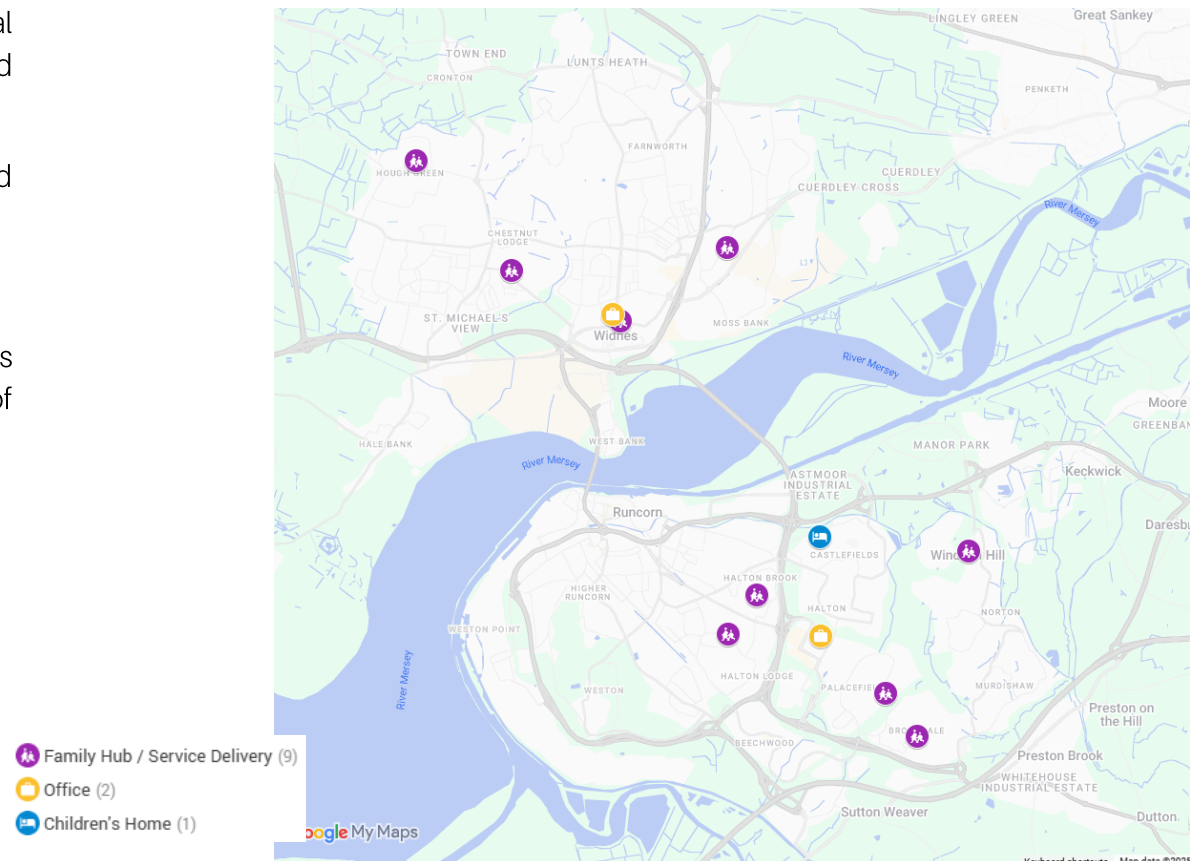
Runcorn

- Rutland House
- Brookvale Family Hub
- Halton Brook Family Hub
- Halton Lodge Family Hub
- Windmill Hill Family Hub
- Glendale Centre
- Inglefield Children's Home

Widnes

- Municipal Building
- Ditton Family Hub/Ditton Library
- Kingsway Family Hub
- Warrington Road Family Hub
- Upton Family Hub

Figure 4.1 Map of Existing Children's Services Assets in Halton



4. Service Requirements

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OFFICE SPACE

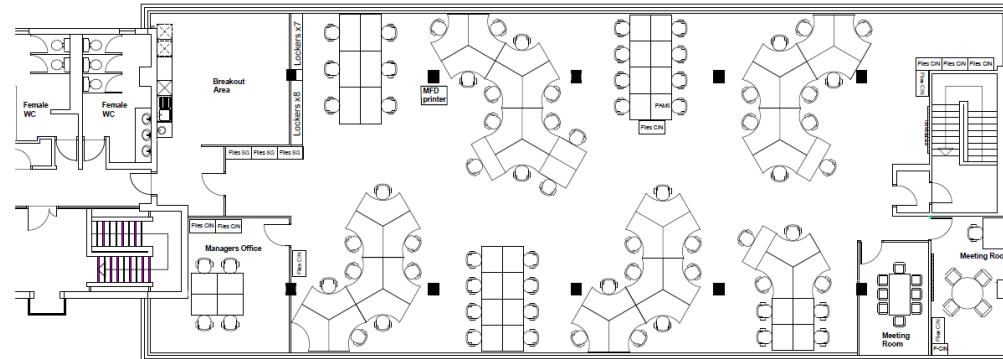
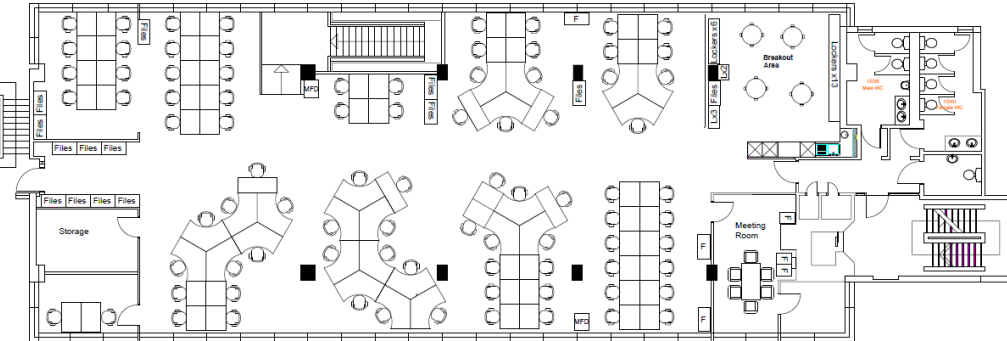
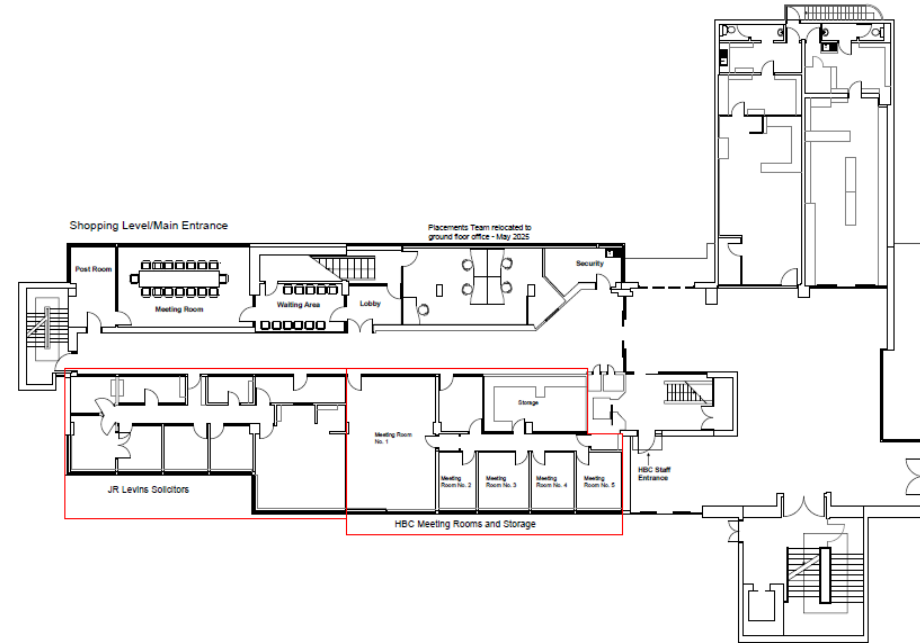
Table 4.1 Overview of Children's Services Office Space: Rutland House

Rutland House	
Type	Office Building
Size	1,177sqm of Children's Services office floorspace
Location	Located in the centre of Runcorn, connected to Runcorn Shopping City. Co-located with Halton Direct Link, Halton Lea Library, and Runcorn Police Station.
Age & Quality	Built in the 1970s. The building is of poor quality externally, surrounded by several vacant and derelict buildings. Internally, the building is of average quality. Whilst the space is acceptable for use as office space, the décor is outdated and there have been issues reported with temperature and lifts.
Ownership	Long lease to Aubrey Weis/Sun Alliance until December 2094
Description	Rutland House is the main Council office building located in Runcorn, spread across 4 floors. The building is the base for several teams alongside Children's Services, including external organisations. Rutland House is almost entirely restricted for public access aside from a conference room.
Children's Services	CIC & Care Leavers; Fostering; Placement Team; Safeguarding; Virtual School; Early Years & School Improvement; Admissions & Capital; SEN & Education Welfare; Commissioning; 14-19 Teams; Policy & Performance; Admin; CINCP.
Other Services	JR Levins Solicitors; NHS England; HM Courts & Tribunal
Workstations (Children's Services)	<u>1st Floor East Wing</u> = 83 <u>2nd Floor East Wing</u> = 76 (including 4 x Heads of Service office; 2 x Directors office) <u>3rd Floor West Wing</u> = 73 (including: Managers office (4)) Total = 232
Meeting / Breakout Rooms	Family Facing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground Floor - 1 boardroom style meeting room used for family conferences Council Only: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st Floor East Wing - 1 meeting room (6); 1 breakout area • 3rd Floor West Wing - 2 meeting rooms (8 & 4); 1 breakout area
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free parking • Kitchen in each wing • Lift • Located by Runcorn Shopping City with access to amenities

4. Service Requirements

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OFFICE SPACE cont.

Rutland House – Children's Services Office Space Provision



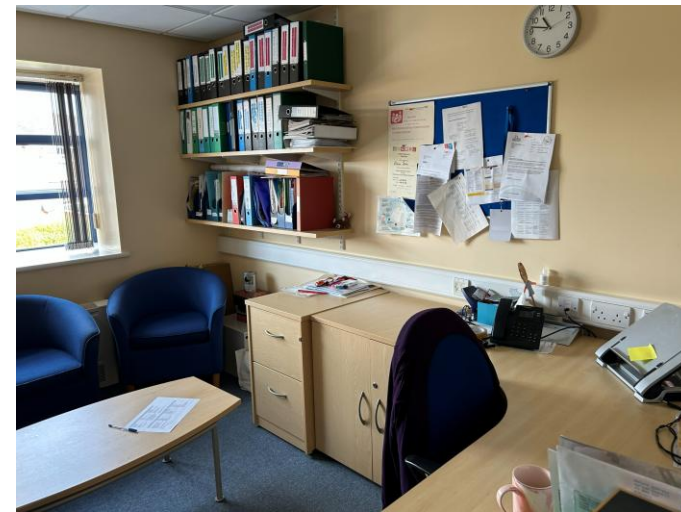
4. Service Requirements

COMMUNITY OFFICE SPACE

As well as office space for Children's Services in Rutland House and the Municipal Building. There is a significant amount of office space based in the Family Hubs. Table 4.5 sets out the size of office floorspace and number of desks in each Hub.

Table 4.5 Office Floorspace & Desks in the Community

Community Office Space	Desks	Office (sqm)
Brookvale Family Hub	20	77
Halton Brook Family Hub	13	30
Halton Lodge Family Hub	24	77
Windmill Hill Family Hub	6	23
Kingsway Family Hub	35	266
Warrington Road Family Hub	16	74
Ditton Family Hub	20	94
Upton Family Hub	2	-
Glendale Centre	25	134



4. Service Requirements

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OFFICE SPACE SWOT

Table 4.6 Children's Services Office Space – Strengths & Weaknesses

	Rutland House	Municipal Building	Community Office Space
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good location in the centre of Runcorn with access to the shopping centre and good parking. • Co-location of most Children's Services teams and big open plan floorspace is beneficial for collaborative working. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good quality building with plenty of parking. • Central location within walking distance to shops and the community. • The floor used by Children's Services co-located multi-agency teams that work with ICART/DAT. • The building is 24/7 so out of hours staff can always access. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of different good quality office spaces available in buildings across Runcorn and Widnes. • Windmill Hill Family Hub: office space decorated by volunteers at local company. • Upton Family Hub: utilises the school receptionist by covering a small portion of the wage.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a severe lack of meeting rooms, rooms for private conversations, comfortable breakout spaces, and training rooms. E.g. the Education team struggle to find space to host confidential meetings with professionals such as Ofsted. Teams often travel to the stadium for meetings which feel counterproductive when they are already all based in an office building. • When teams need more desk space they have to go through the Asset Management Group with a business plan and this can be a lengthy process. • Having most workers based on one side of the bridge can be a problem. • No male toilet on the 3rd floor. • More appropriate breastfeeding room required. • Some staff are unhappy with the quality of the building, as well as complaints about adequate equipment and heating. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The floor is often fully utilised. A desk rota is used but this is still not enough. • Lots of lockers that aren't used and spaces taken up for storage that could be better utilised. • Used to be a café in the building which has now gone and vending machines are empty. • Staff working here would like breakout areas with comfortable seating, and a quiet area. • Meeting rooms on ground floor are used for important meetings such as child protection meetings. These are bookable but get booked far in advance. Would be happy to use other rooms in the community if they were free of charge. These meeting rooms are also not family friendly and can be too corporate for the sensitive situations that are taking place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most offices in Hubs are for hybrid working but some are rarely full. However, some such as Ditton Family Hub & Kingsway Family Hub, are verging on full capacity and do not currently have the capacity to integrate changes through FFP. • A key issue is staff not being aware of the office space available to them, not knowing whether desks will be free and there can be issues with staff feeling unwelcome if they do not usually work in Hubs. • Parking issues in Kingsway Family Hub.

4. Service Requirements

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OFFICE SPACE SWOT

Table 4.6 Children's Services Office Space – Opportunities & Threats

	Rutland House	Municipal Building	Community Office Space
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vacant offices on the ground floor formerly used by solicitors are vacant and discussions are in progress for opening these as meeting rooms. • Using the library for meeting rooms. • More use of community spaces for both desk working and meetings / training. This will begin happening as the FFP pilot begins in January. • Some teams would love to be making more use of community facilities but currently do not have the awareness on what is available, who can use them and for what types of activities/meetings. • Make the office space more flexible beneficial to staff wellbeing e.g. standing desks, screens, appropriate chairs etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no opportunities in relation to this building as it is scheduled to no longer be used by Children's Services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for creating additional office space in Ditton Family Hub, Kingsway Family Hub, Warrington Road Family Hub. If one building were to be invested in to create more office space then Warrington Road Family Hub would be the preference as it has the most potential. • Develop an easy to use and accessible desk booking system and ensure that all staff utilise it and stick to bookings.
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference room on the ground floor that is used for multi-agency conferences is completely unsuitable, is cause for confidentiality concerns and a new solution is required. Due to the serious nature of these conferences, Hubs are often not appropriate. • Whilst there is a big push to move more Children's Services work into the community, Rutland House has a long lease so will still need to be utilised. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The space in Municipal Building will be closing, meaning new space will be needed for ICART/DAT. This space will still need to allow colocation with multi-agency partners needed to run the service effectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the transition to FFP, there will be a bigger focus on community-based working and expansion of some teams, meaning more desk space / better utilisation of space will be required in Hubs. • Creating more office space in Hubs threatens to harm the balance between office and service delivery and risks diluting teams. • Glendale Centre: in the process of moving the family support team into the offices. When they arrive there will not be enough desk space for everyone.

4. Service Requirements

CHILDREN'S SERVICES DELIVERY SPACE

The majority of the service delivery that takes place in Halton outside of homes, takes place in the 8 Family Hubs and in the Glendale Centre. The table below provides an overview of each building in Halton used for Children's Services delivery.

	Overview
Brookvale Family Hub	Family Hub with office space, an old school hall used for health clinics/ groupwork, operational café space operated 2 mornings a week by the community, a community planting space, room for midwives, boardroom style meeting room, large creche and some family time rooms.
Halton Brook Family Hub	Small centre located next to a Church. Small amount of service delivery takes place here. It has a training room that is sometimes used by a youth club and for staff meetings, a former creche used for young people, a small contact room and some office space for the parent team. This is not a fully fledged Hub because it doesn't have a reception. The building is closed when all staff are on visits.
Halton Lodge Family Hub	Family Hub that opens into a large, mostly unused atrium. Staff office space and several meeting rooms, as well as a medical room, sensory room, large creche, baby room and conference style meeting room. Private nursery also located inside the building.
Windmill Hill Family Hub	Smaller of the Runcorn Family Hubs with a large playroom used for group sessions, family time / 1:1 rooms and some office space. Often a preference for family time due to it being more private. Part of the building is listed and sits next to a primary school and a church which provides a triangle of social support for the community.
Kingsway Family Hub	Connected to Widnes Library with the Family Hub upstairs. There is a main hall used for group activities and a multi-purpose creche space that is also used for activities such as baby massage. There are also a few options for 1:1 sessions, and a small sensory room. There is 1 room upstairs that is available to hire for training/meetings. Good amount of office space. Rooms in the library can be used and there is a private nursery in the building.
Warrington Road Family Hub	Family Hub connected to a primary school that has several good-sized rooms for different types of group work, as well as a large kitchen set up for family cooking sessions. There are also several service delivery rooms, a creche and an outdoor space used for forest school, as well as a midwifery room and office space.
Ditton Family Hub	Provides Locality Team with a significant amount of office space as well as several multi-purpose rooms used for 1:1 and group work for all ages e.g. baby massage, family time, parenting courses, speech and language. There is a large youth centre, meeting rooms and a creche. There are 2 community centre rooms that Children's Services can book.
Upton Family Hub	Extension onto a primary school providing a creche, a large sensory room, a medical room and a meeting room often used for courses and adult learning, plus a small office space. Serves the community more on the outskirts of Widnes. Host some large events using outdoor area.
Glendale Centre	Recently taken up by the Edge of Care team to support older children and their families. Mostly closed to the public as service delivery taking place here can be sensitive and carries a high-risk level. Entry from the public is by appointment only aside from 2 community groups per week which have taken place there historically. This is the only building that is purely dedicated to supporting older children. Key features include 3 rooms and a large kitchen that can be used by families, as well as office space.

4. Service Requirements

CHILDREN'S SERVICE DELIVERY SPACE cont.

The table below sets out the different types of spaces that are currently available within each Children's Services delivery building.

Key spaces required in Family Hubs:

- **Welcome & Access:** for a single point of access, engagement and triage
- **Advice & Assessment:** private / small consultation room for 1:1 support, assessment & casework e.g. Early Help assessment; Health Visitor appointment
- **Multi-Agency Working Space**
- **Group & Programme Delivery:** for preventative & targeted interventions e.g. flexible group rooms; youth groups; perinatal groups. With moveable furniture &

storage.

- **Early Years & Play:** for child development, attachment & observation e.g. stay & play; sensory play; baby-friendly spaces
- **Health & Wellbeing:** e.g. Health Visitor; infant feeding; mental health practitioner
- **Youth & Adolescent:** informal rooms for emotional wellbeing support; 1:1 youth work; group sessions
- **Family & Relationship Support:** family mediation; parenting conflict support etc.
- **Community & Voluntary Sector:** bookable rooms for voluntary groups
- **Staff & Operational Spaces**

Table 4.7 Children's Services Delivery Space

	Rooms for Available for Family Time	Family Time Rooms (sqm)	Activity Space (sqm)	Activity Space Type	Creche (sqm)	Health Rooms
Brookvale Family Hub	5	87	188	Play Room	83	1
Halton Brook Family Hub	1	9	41	Play Area	-	-
Halton Lodge Family Hub	5	106	52	Open space not currently in use	92	1
Windmill Hill Family Hub	1	32	100	Games Room	-	-
Kingsway Family Hub	2	21	94	Main Hall	45	1
Warrington Road Family Hub	3	105	129	Training Room with sink; 'Daisy' used for playgroups	45	1
Ditton Family Hub	3	46	181	Youth Centre Additional bookable rooms in the building not included in sqft	33	-
Upton Family Hub	2	45	-	-	48	1
Glendale Centre	Glendale has 3 rooms that can be used for families (59.6sqm) but the spaces here are exclusively for use of the Edge of Care team.					

4. Service Requirements

CHILDREN'S SERVICES DELIVERY SPACE cont.



4. Service Requirements

CHILDREN'S SERVICES DELIVERY SPACE SWOT

Table 4.8 Children's Services Delivery Space - SWOT

Children's Services Delivery Space	
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 different spaces out in the community that cover all of the requirements for a good Family Hub service delivery. These buildings are good quality, well-maintained and generally very welcoming and family-friendly spaces. • The Hubs/Centres are well-located across Halton with 4 in Widnes and 5 in Runcorn allowing access for families across the borough. • All units have some form of outside space, with some being great sizes, well-maintained and well-used by the community. • These buildings provide plenty of space for use by the community and often integrate with primary schools, nurseys and local churches to create a good sense of integration with the community. • Whilst some Hubs are smaller and may not look as family friendly as others, these can often be preferred for Family Time sessions as they can feel like more discreet buildings. • Midwifery/Health Visitor rooms are very beneficial to the community as there is not a birthing hospital in Halton. • Glendale Centre provides a great dedicated space for children using the Edge of Care service - it is dedicated to older children and can be well-controlled to deal with the riskier nature of this type of service delivery.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A key issue raised about service delivery in Halton is that there feels like there is a lack of space to delivery Family Time sessions. Families usually want to arrange these after school which means that a lot of the space is empty during the day but fully booked after school. However, there also appears to be a lack of knowledge of all of the different spaces that are available across the borough, what they can be used for and how to book them. They also struggle having lots of children here at this time as they all need feeding. • There is a lack of space that is suitable for older children. • Issues in some buildings (Kingsway Family Hub & Halton Brook Family Hub) with having to walk through spaces to access other rooms which means they are underutilised for groupwork. • Glendale Centre still has 2 external community groups run from there every week which can cause issues when having Edge of Care children in the space at the same time.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a clear digital map of all of the spaces available in Family Hubs, what they can be used for, and develop an easy to use and accessible booking system than can be used across Children's Services. • Increase the opening hours of Hubs to allow for an extra hour of Family Time sessions after school hours.
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the move to the new FFP structure that will see more staff working in the community, there is a risk that Hubs shift too far towards being office buildings rather than spaces for the community. It will be important to maintain this as the transition takes place. • Hubs are still working to try and remove their reputation as a Children's Centre and ensure that the wider community know that it is open to all parents and children of all ages. • The current working culture across Children's Services is a threat to integrating a more widespread use of service delivery across all available assets. There are concerns about staff feeling unwelcome in some buildings and not understanding what spaces they can or cannot use.

4. Service Requirements

CHILDREN'S HOMES / CARE LEAVER HOMES

There is only 1 active residential home for children in Halton, the details of which are set out below:

Inglefield Children's Home

Inglefield has been open for 51 years and is a Children's Home that provides respite to families caring for children with complex behaviour and disabilities. They offer overnight stay but is not for permanent residence.

There is capacity for up to 4 children to stay overnight. At the moment they provide for 21 children but this can go up to 25 at one time. Young people cannot stay for more than 75 days in a year or they become a Looked After Child. There are 6 bedrooms but only 4 can be used at a time due to the size of the living space. They are open overnight 5 days per week from Wednesday to Monday.

There is currently a waiting list in Halton for short breaks so they can only offer each child 1 or 2 nights a month to accommodate as many children as possible. The demand has drastically increased in recent years, in part believed to be due to an increased awareness of the service.

The building has a 6 bedrooms, a living room, kitchen, garden, staff offices, play area, therapy room, sensory room and games room. Bedrooms and bathrooms are adapted for children with different needs, including a safe space room.

Pre-Covid they used to charge for out of borough children to use the service. This was generating income to pay for extra staff and overtime. There is an opportunity to start doing this again and charge ~£800 a night.

Inglefield Children's Home



Issues and Opportunities with Assets for Children Looked After in Halton

- The major issue in Halton is that there are no residential care facilities so all children that require this must go out of borough, away from the area they are familiar with, and at a high cost to the Council.
- The Council currently have 1 trainer flat and ~4 supported accommodation flats for Care Leavers but generally this care is outsourced privately and/or out of borough.
- There is the opportunity to expand Inglefield into Lavendar House next door, which is currently used by a private provider as a Care Leavers building, P3, who are due to move into a new premises.
- Several schemes are undergoing feasibility and planning to introduce local authority provision of residential care for Children Looked After in Halton.

4. Service Requirements

NON-CHILDREN'S SERVICES ASSETS

In addition to the Children's Services assets reviewed above, as part of the study, site visits also took place at 3 additional Council sites to understand if there are any opportunities available at these sites for use by Children's Services, either for office or service delivery space. The details of these 2 sites have been set out below.

Site	Description	Current Use by Children's Services	Opportunities
Murdishaw Community Centre	A small Runcorn based community centre, located next door to The Bridge School. Has a large playroom space that is regularly booked for evening activities and training. To the side of the playroom is a small office, activity room and communal kitchen. The Growth Company were previously using this space to train 40 students. The hope is to get funding to continue using this space for training. There is a large Main Hall that is booked in daytime and evenings for e.g. Slimming World, kids parties, Santa's grotto etc. It costs £14.40 per hour to hire the Main Hall. There is a good size meeting room at the front.	The space used to be used more extensively by Children's Services but this has reduced considerably since Children's have had their own facilities.	The only opportunity would be to convert the space off the play area into office space, but a use for this has already been identified. There is good space available to book for group activities / larger meetings if required but this would be charged.
Castlefields Community Centre	A large, modern community centre located in the Village Square in Runcorn. There are 2 meeting rooms that can open up into one large room, an office for the Manager and a small office that is let out to a tenant. There is a community café and laptops available for community use. There is a large Main Hall that is booked for activities such as sports classes and theatre groups. An additional large meeting/activity room is located at the back of the building available to hire for £11.70 an hour, including an additional small office that is let to an IT training company.	No specific current use by Children's Services. A charge is applied if Children's Services wish to use any of the space.	No opportunities identified. Some good quality spaces available to book for group activities if needed.
Old Police Station	A complex building with a variety of different spaces. The majority of the building is made up of small meeting rooms that are well used by therapists. These are leased at £180 a month. The Community Hub team office is too big for its purpose with only 1 person generally using it at a time. There is a good sized training suite which is used ad hoc. This is advertised for lease at £750 a month. The old Courtroom is now a conference room which is let out for training, NHS, fitness groups etc. This is more of a commercial building.	No current use by Children's Services.	No definitive opportunities identified. There is some office space available but basing some Children's Services desk-based work from here would not have a great deal of strategic fit as it is more of a commercial building than a community base.

4. Service Requirements

ADDITIONAL SERVICE REQUIREMENTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Families First Partnership (FFP)

Following the implantation of the national FFP programme, Halton will be delivering a community-based Family Help model, hosted in Rutland House with the Multi-Disciplinary Team working together from both Rutland House and within community-based buildings.

Heads of Service are preparing spaces in both Rutland House and within community-based buildings. There will be approximately 13-15 staff in the pilot team, that will test the new ways of working before wider rollout.

Decommissioning of the Municipal Building

It was announced in December 2025 that, as part of HBC's long term accommodation strategy, the Municipal Building will be decommissioned and office space vacated by 2027. This is following a review of the sustainability and suitability of the site, and to explore opportunities the site could offer as part of the wider Kingsway Quarter development and Widnes Town Centre Regeneration Plan. Work will now take place to understand current working arrangements in order to design plans and spaces for more efficient working. No decisions have currently been made about staff relocation.

The Bridge School

The Bridge School is a Key Stage 3 and 4 Pupil Referral Unit that serves Halton and is within the remit of Children's Services. It provides alternative education for secondary-aged students who are unable to attend mainstream school for a range of reasons, including behavioural challenges or risk of exclusion. The current facility is located within an industrial estate, and the space has been outgrown. Potential options to explore include surplus school places in Runcorn allowing space to be offered up for The Bridge School to use facilities or find an existing asset that could be use. There has been suggestion that space in Ditton Family Hub may be available and could be tested for feasibility. The requirement would be 10 classrooms for 100 children.

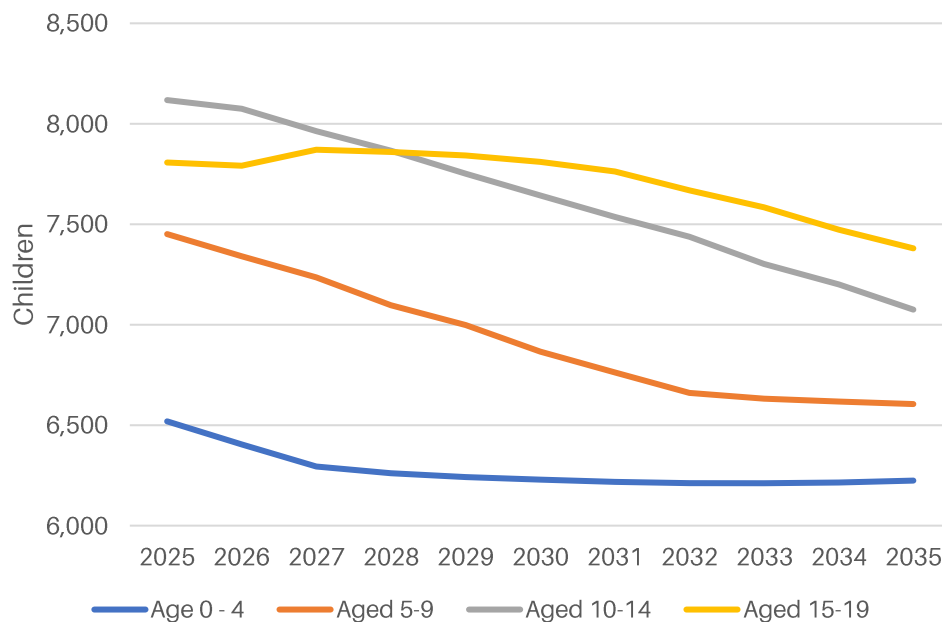
4. Service Requirements

CHILD POPULATION PROJECTIONS

The ONS projects that by 2035 there will be 27,284 children in Halton aged 15-19. This is a projected 9% decrease from the projections for 2025.

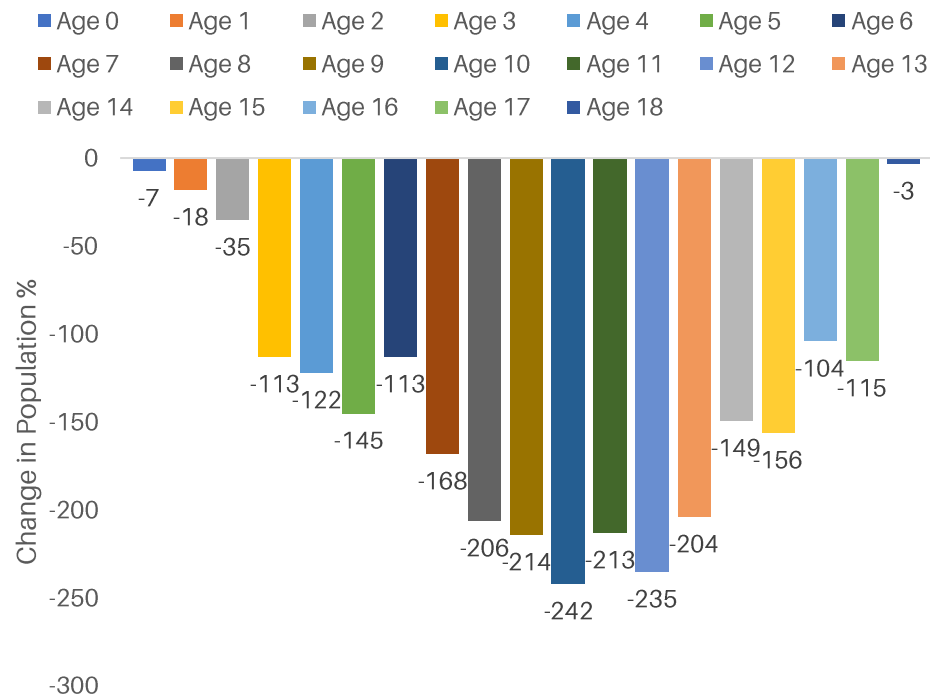
The largest proportion of children will be made up of older children aged 15-19 (7,380 children; 27%), with the size of age groups decreasing with age. Only 23% of children will be aged 0-4 (6,224 children) meaning there will be 1,156 more older teenagers than babies / toddlers. The key shift will be the number of 15-19-year-olds exceeding 10-14-year-olds after 2028.

Figure 4.1 Halton Child Population Projections (2025-2035)



Source: ONS

Figure 4.2 Projected Change in Halton Population by Age (2025-2035)



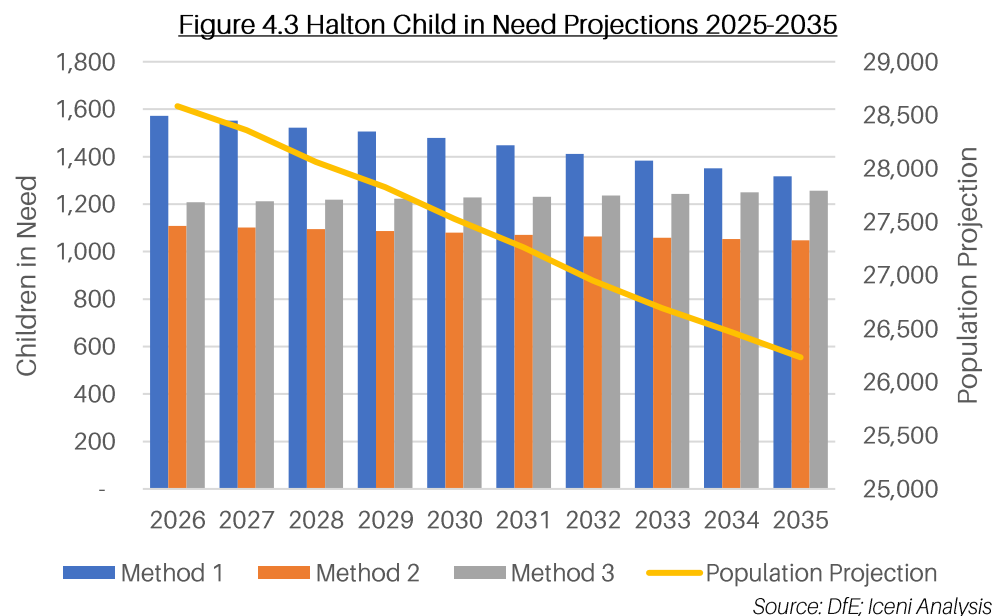
Source: ONS

All age groups under 18 are projected to decrease in Halton between 2025 and 2035. The largest decrease is expected to be age 10, where there is estimated to be 242 less children (-15%). All ages between 7 and 13 are projected to decrease by more than 10%. Decreases in age 0-2 and age 18 are projected to be marginal.

4. Service Requirements

PROJECTED DEMAND - CHILDREN IN NEED

To estimate the current demand for Children's Services in Halton, 3 different projection methods have been used to test different growth scenarios. All of these scenarios include the Halton child population projections. These projections are set out in Figure 4.3.



Method 1 – High Demand

This projection method estimates that in 2035 there will be 1,317 Children in Need in Halton. This is an increase of 116 children (10%) on current figures.

This method also estimates that there will be 528 children undergoing a Section 47, 248 children on a CPP at any point in the year and 161 children undergoing an ICPC.

Assumptions:

- Method 1 projections are based on the national linear forecast of the % of children in England that were classified as Children in Need between 2013-2025, against Halton's population projections to 2035.

Method 2 – Low Demand

This projection method estimates that in 2035 there will be 1,048 Children in Need in Halton. This would be a decrease in 153 children from 2025, a reduction of 13%.

This method also estimates that there will be 832 children undergoing a Section 47, 318 children on a CPP at any point in the year and 150 children undergoing an ICPC.

Assumptions:

- Method 2 projections are based on a linear forecast of the % of children in Halton that were classified as Children in Need between 2013-2025, against population projections to 2035.

Method 3 – Medium Demand

The 3rd method estimates that in 2035, 1,257 will be Children in Need in Halton. This represents a 5% increase on 2025, equivalent to an additional 56 children.

This method also estimates that there will be 1,417 undergoing a Section 47, 547 children on a CPP at any point in the year and 281 children undergoing an ICPC.

Assumptions:

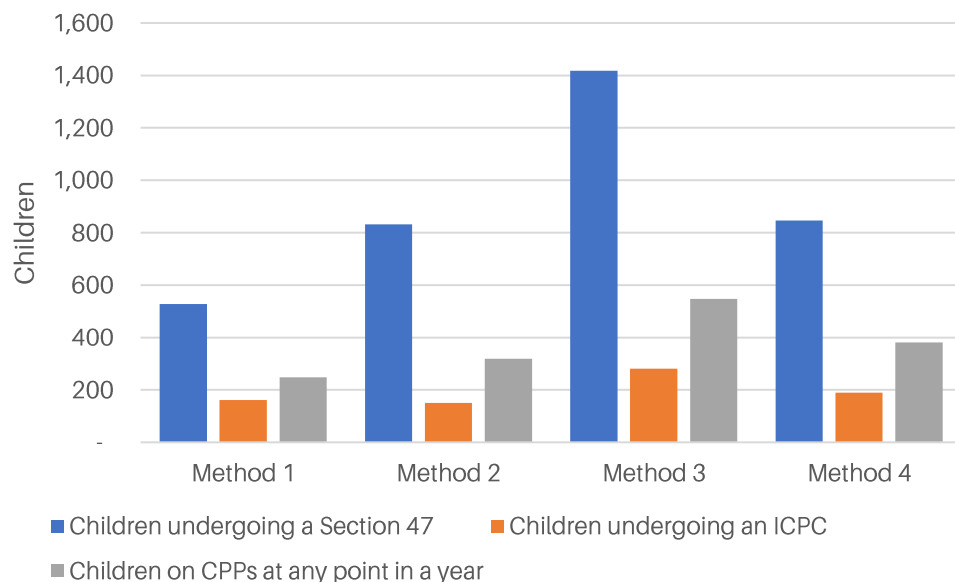
- Method 3 projections are based on year-on-year growth of Children in Need in Halton between 2013 and 2025, applied to Halton's population projections.

4. Service Requirements

PROJECTED DEMAND - CHILDREN IN NEED

Figure 4.4 below sets out the projections demand for Section 47 enquiries, ICPC's and CPP's in 2035 based on Methods 1-3 and an additional Method 4.

Figure 4.4 Projected Demand – Children undergoing Section 47s, ICPCs and CPPs 2035

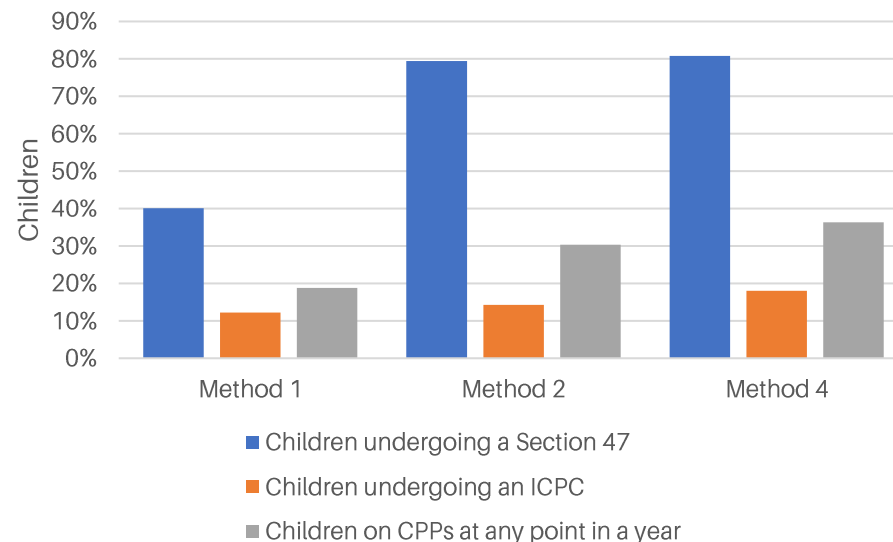


Source: DfE; Icen Analysis

Method 4 Assumptions:

- Method 4 has been based on the Method 2 Child in Need linear forecast, but estimated children undergoing ICPC, Section 47 and CPPs has been estimated based on the linear forecast of the % of Children in Need going down each pathway.

Figure 4.5 Projected Demand for Children's Services Pathways by % of Children in Need (2035)



Source: DfE; Icen Analysis

Figure 4.5 shows these projections as a % of projected Children in Need. Method 3 can be discounted due to estimates showing a higher number of children undergoing a Section 47 enquiry than projected total of Children in Need.

This shows that method 2 and 3 show a similar proportion of Children in Need undergoing a Section 47 at 79% and 81% respectively. Method 1 shows a decrease to 41%. This is compared to current figures of 59%.

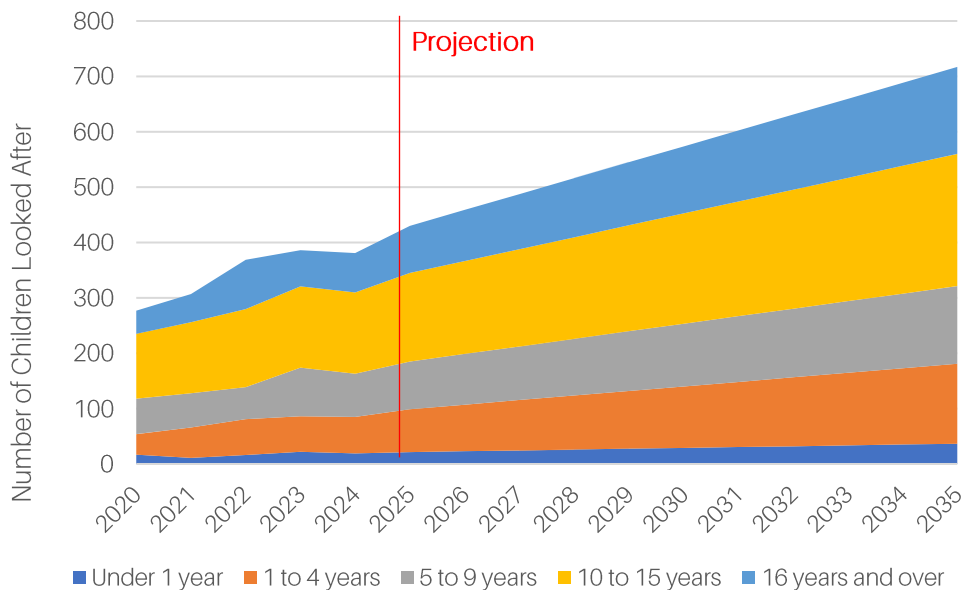
The projections methods show a range of 36-19% of cases escalating to a CPP and 18-12% escalating to ICPCs in 2035. This is compared to 28% and 18% in 2025.

4. Service Requirements

PROJECTED DEMAND - CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

To project the number of Children Looked After in Halton in 2035, linear extrapolation used on the number of Children Looked After, using 2020-2024 data. According to this forecast, the number of Children Looked After is estimated to increase by 88% to 717 children, an addition of 336 more children.

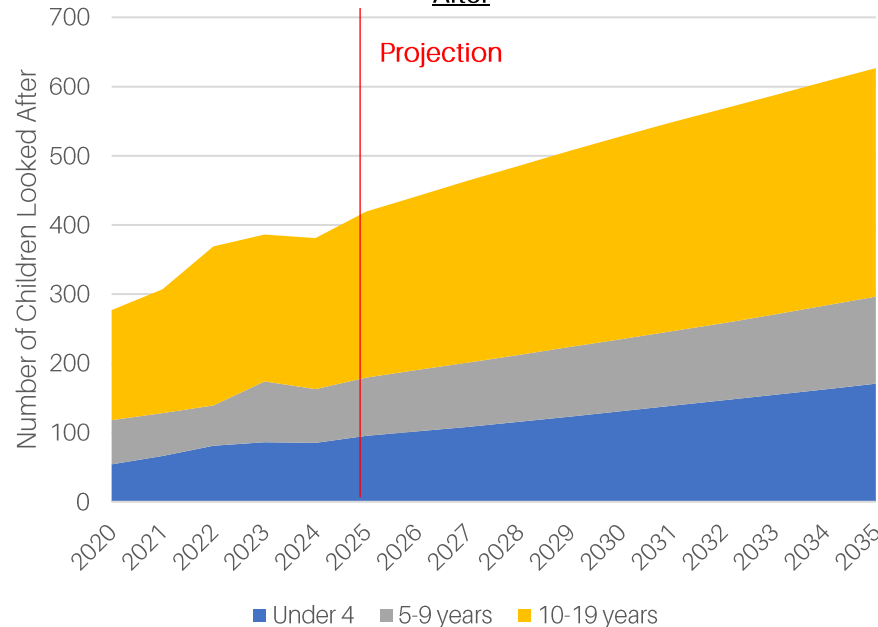
Figure 4.6 Linear Forecast for Children Looked After in Halton in 2035



Source: Icen analysis

By age, this predicts there will be 18 more children aged under 1 (+92%), 79 more children aged 1-4 (+119%), 62 more children aged 5-9 (+80%), 92 more children aged 10-15 (+62%) and 86 more children aged 16+ (+121%).

Figure 4.7 Linear Forecast by % Child Age Population that are being Looked After



Source: Icen analysis

This second method uses a linear extrapolation of the % of children by age band who are being looked after using 2020 and 2024 data.

In 2020, 0.9% of the child age population were being looked after. By 2024, this increased to 1.2%. Extrapolating forwards, this could increase to 2.6% of the child age population, but noting the population is due to decrease.

This would result in Children Looked After in Halton to increase to 627 children by 2035 - 246 more children and a 64% increase. This includes 86 more children under 4 (+101%), 48 more children aged 5-9 (+61%) and 112 more children aged 10-19 (+51%)

4. Service Requirements

PROJECTED DEMAND - CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

Figure 4.8 sets out the current demand for different types of placements for Children Looked After, compared with both projection methods. The table below sets out estimated gap between current and future demand.

The method using population based change estimates the highest need, including 267 foster placements (+14%) and 163 placed with parents or other person with parental responsibility (+213%). This also includes 55 children in secure homes or children's homes (12 more than currently) and 93 in independent and semi-independent living arrangements/supported accommodation (+68 children).

The second method estimates a need for 48 children to be placed in secure homes and children's homes, which is 5 more than were in 2025, and 81 children in independent and semi-independent living arrangements / supported accommodation (56 additional children). Foster placements are estimated to remain largely unchanged and 90 children place with parents or another person with parental responsibility.

Figure 4.8 Halton Projected Children Looked After by Placement Type in 2035

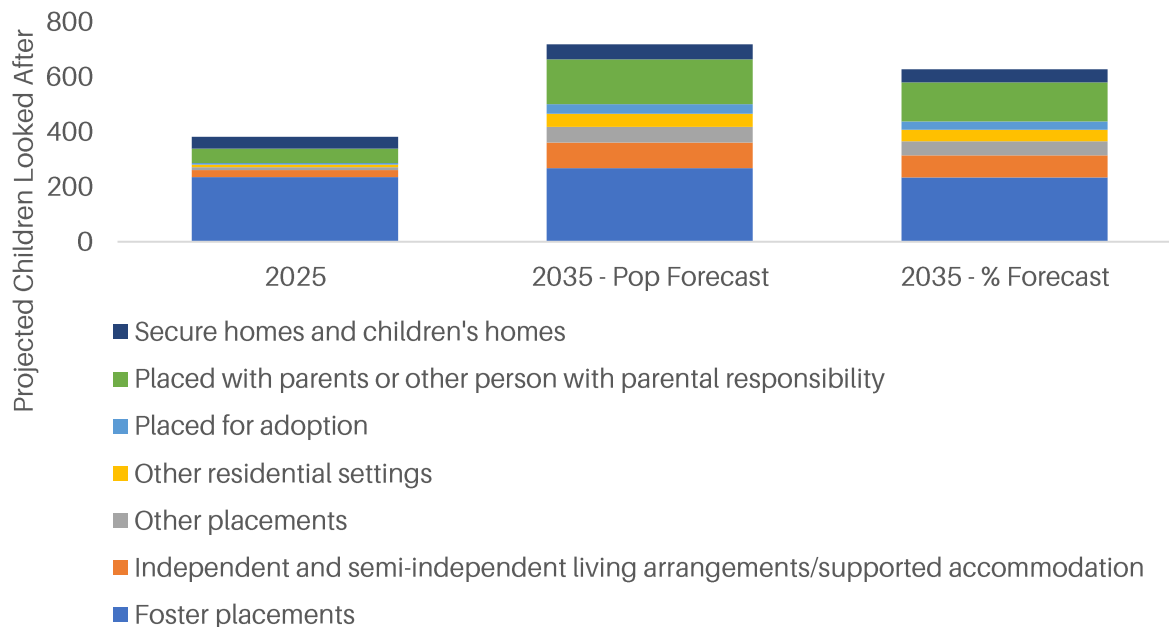


Table 4.1 Gap Analysis – Halton Children Looked After Projections

	Foster Placements	Independent And Semi-independent	Other Placements	Other Residential Settings	Placed For Adoption	Placed With Parents / Parental Responsibility	Secure Homes And Children's Homes	Total
2025	235	25	11	9	6	52	43	381
2035 - Pop based Change (No.)	32	68	47	38	28	111	12	336
2035 - Pop based Change (%)	14%	271%	427%	427%	472%	213%	27%	88%
2035 - % based Change (No.)	-1	56	40	32	24	90	5	246
2035 - % based Change (%)	-1%	224%	361%	361%	400%	174%	11%	64%

4. Service Requirements

OVERVIEW OF FUTURE SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

Overall, the key future service requirements that can be concluded from this study are:

- Demand for Children's Services is set to increase and assets will need to be expanded and adapted in order to cater to this demand.
- The introduction of the FFP programme will create more pressure on Family Hubs to have adequate desk space and good flexible working policies to support a higher volume of staff.
- More meeting rooms and breakout spaces are required for staff in Rutland House, as well as improved equipment including monitors, chairs etc.
- The conference room on the ground floor of Rutland House urgently requires upgrading and conference facilities needed in Widnes.
- Either additional space or a better utilisation of available space is required for Family Time sessions in Family Hubs.
- Spaces in the Hubs need to cater more for older children.

5. Space Provision Scenarios

An aerial photograph of a park featuring a large green lawn, a winding lake with several sailboats, and a dense line of trees. In the background, a city skyline is visible under a clear sky. The text '5. Space Provision Scenarios' is overlaid in large white font on a semi-transparent dark grey background.

5. Space Provision Scenarios

CURRENT FAMILY HUB OFFICE SPACE & POTENTIAL WITH MAXIMUM SPACE UTILISATION

The table below sets out the number of desks currently in each of the Family Hubs / Children's Centres in Halton and how many desks there are per sqm of office space. These desk numbers may be updated following an internal review.

With the transition to FFP, there will be greater emphasis on desk working in these buildings. This exercise has been used to understand the capacity of existing office space for desks.

According to Health & Safety Executive, the UK's national regulator for workplace health and safety, the lowest limit for desk space should be 4.6sqm. This is also recommended by other sources including BizSpace and Easy Offices as the

minimum for a high-density open plan layout.

The table sets out a high-level indication of how many desks could fit into the current office floorspace in these buildings if the minimum space requirement was followed.

The result of this analysis is that most of the buildings are already maximising desks in existing office space, aside from Kingsway Family Hub and Glendale Centre where there could be potential for more.

	Desks	Office (sqm)	Office Space per Desk (sqm)	Desks with Max. Utilisation	Change in Desks
Brookvale Family Hub	20	77.2	3.86	16	-4
Halton Brook Family Hub	13	29.8	2.29	6	-7
Halton Lodge Family Hub	24	76.5	3.19	16	-8
Windmill Hill Family Hub	6	6	3.85	5	-1
Kingsway Family Hub	35	265.9	7.6	57	+22
Warrington Road Family Hub	16	74	4.63	16	-
Ditton Family Hub	20	93.8	4.69	20	-
Upton Family Hub	2	Upton Family Hub is discounted due to there being a lack of demand/need for more desk space.			
Glendale Centre	25	134	5.36	29	+4

5. Space Provision Scenarios

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILY HUB OFFICE SPACE REPURPOSEMENT

The table below summarises potential opportunities to repurpose existing underutilised space in each Family Hub to create more office space and increase the number of desks. 4 of these buildings have some potential space that could be converted into office space.

There is a caveat that some of these figures may change following internal review. Some options may also be discounted if deemed not appropriate / feasible.

The table outlines the potential net additional space through the repurposing and how many additional desks this would create by following the minimum requirement of 1 desk per 4.6sqm.

	Opportunities for Repurposing to Office Space	Net Additional Office (sqm)	Total Desks (Expansion + Max. Utilisation)	Net Additional Desks
Brookvale Family Hub	No viable office repurposing opportunity.			-4
Halton Brook Family Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand larger room to create open plan with 2 small offices. Currently underutilised space. 	+37.9	14	+1
Halton Lodge Family Hub	No viable office repurposing opportunity.			-8
Windmill Hill Family Hub	No viable office repurposing opportunity.			-1
Kingsway Family Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Merge Managers Office and 2 smaller offices connected to Children's Centre Office to create more open plan. This would allow for better space utilisation. Exchange the Children's Centre Office with the Community team for larger office upstairs. 	+31.2	64	+29
Warrington Road Family Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Move the offices in Bluebell in Daisy/Daffodil and use Bluebell for service delivery. Knock through former Headteachers Office and small Managers Office into Staff Office and Staff Room to create one large open plan office. 	+70.1	31	+15
Ditton Family Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knock through from the Main Office into the room next door that is currently used for external evening activities (or create a 'pack away' office) Convert the creche into office space. Convert meeting room to the side of the Youth Centre to office space. 	+152.4	53	+33
Glendale Centre	Glendale Centre is discounted from further changes as it is transitioning into a base for Edge of Care and Family Support. Desk space will be limited so hot desking policy will be in place.			

5. Space Provision Scenarios

CURRENT FAMILY HUB OFFICE SPACE & POTENTIAL WITH MAXIMUM SPACE UTILISATION

Another way to increase and improve access to desks in buildings in the community is to implement good hot desking practice. This refers to there being a good awareness of all facilities and an accurate desk booking system that is adhered to by all staff. Feedback from stakeholder engagement strongly suggested that awareness of desk spaces, as well as a culture of feeling unwelcome in certain spaces, or being unsure when desks can be used, was a major barrier to transition into more work taking place at desks in these buildings.

This high-level analysis is based on an assumed hybrid working policy of an average of 2.5 office days per week per staff member and an 80% utilisation rate of desk space.

This shows that by investing in good hot desking practice can have a significant impact on the amount of staff that can be supported without having to increase the number of desks.

The table also sets out the impact on net additional staff supported to work in these buildings by undertaking the repurposing works in the previous table alongside investing in good hot desking practice.

	Current Desks	Staff Supported with Good Hot Desking Practice	Potential Desks	Potential Staff Supported with Good Hot Desking Practice	Net Additional Staff Supported with Good Hot Desking	Potential Net Additional Staff Supported with Good Hot Desking
Brookvale Family Hub	20	32	16	26	+12	+6
Halton Brook Family Hub	13	21	14	22	+8	+9
Halton Lodge Family Hub	24	38	16	26	+14	+2
Windmill Hill Family Hub	6	10	5	8	+4	+2
Kingsway Family Hub	35	56	64	102	+21	+67
Warrington Road Family Hub	16	26	31	50	+10	+34
Ditton Family Hub	20	32	20	85	+12	+65
Upton Family Hub	2	3	N/A	N/A	+1	N/A
Glendale Centre	25	40	29	46	+15	+21

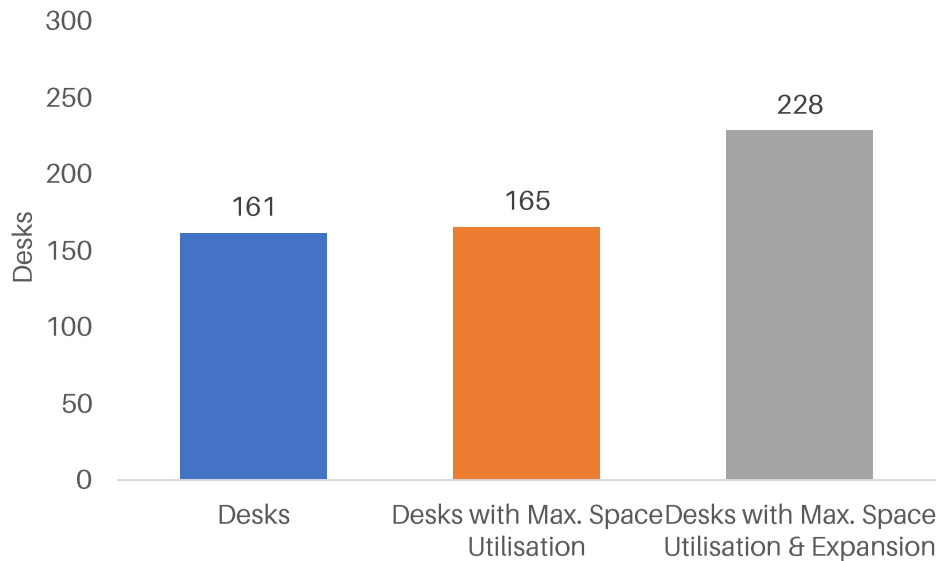
5. Space Provision Scenarios

OVERVIEW OF OFFICE POTENTIAL IN FAMILY HUBS

Overall, there is potential with maximum space utilisation of increasing desks by just 4 desks, implying that the current layout of desks in existing office space has pretty much reached full potential.

There is a maximum total opportunity to increase desks to 228 with space maximisation and repurposing projects. This creates 67 additional desks (+47%).

Potential Number of Desks in Existing Family Hubs



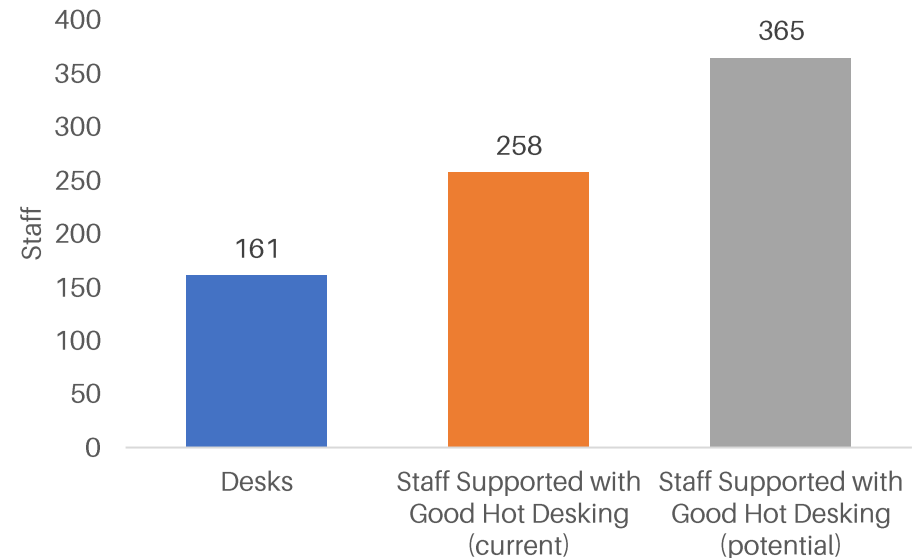
Source: Icen Analysis

There is the potential to support 258 staff per week in Hub office space with a hybrid work policy and good hot desking practice. This is 97 more staff than desks.

With space maximisation and repurposing projects, an additional 203 staff could be supported per week.

Kingsway Family Hub has the most potential for increasing desks with better space utilisation, Ditton Family Hub, Kingsway Family Hub and Warrington Road Family Hub have the most potential for space expansion. However, final estimates on available space is under internal review.

Potential Staff Supported in Existing Family Hubs



Source: Icen Analysis

5. Space Provision Scenarios

FAMILY TIME SESSIONS WITH EXTENDED OPENING HOURS

One of the key service requirements that resulted from this study is more space for Family Time sessions that cater to a range of ages. The analysis below tests how many sessions could be held in the existing Family Time rooms per week, based on the assumption of them being used for just 1 daytime session and 2 afterschool sessions. This is then tested against opening each building for 1 additional hour.

This is a key issue that arose during engagement, that most sessions need to take place after school, but Hubs close around 5-6pm.

Potential to repurpose existing space into additional Family Time rooms is also highlighted where an opportunity was identified. These opportunities could be discounted or altered during stakeholder engagement if deemed not feasible or appropriate.

	Rooms for Available for Family Time	Est. Family Time Sessions per Week*	Est. Family Time Sessions per Week with Extended Opening Hours*	Net Additional Family Time Sessions per Week with Extended Hours	Potential for Additional Family Time Rooms
Brookvale Family Hub	5	75	100	+25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential to convert the external courtyard into additional space but unlikely to work for Family Time.
Halton Brook Family Hub	1	15	20	+5	No identified repurposing opportunities.
Halton Lodge Family Hub	5	75	100	+25	No identified repurposing opportunities.
Windmill Hill Family Hub	1	15	20	+5	No identified repurposing opportunities.
Kingsway Family Hub	2	30	40	+10	No identified repurposing opportunities.
Warrington Road Family Hub	3	45	60	+15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity to convert Training Kitchen into new space and if office was moved from Bluebell this space would become available. However, these would likely be used for group activities rather than Family time
Ditton Family Hub	3	45	60	+15	No identified repurposing opportunities.
Upton Family Hub	2	30	40	+10	No identified repurposing opportunities.

5. Space Provision Scenarios

OVERVIEW OF FAMILY TIME POTENTIAL IN EXISTING HUBS

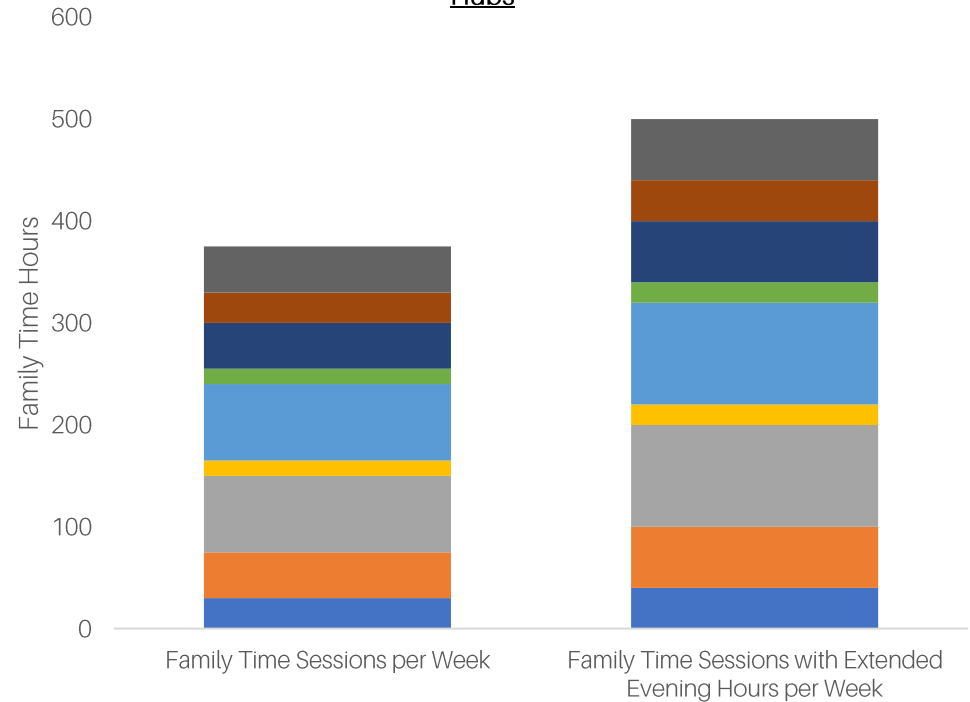
There are currently 25 rooms available across the community buildings for Family Time sessions. Based on 3 sessions held in each room per working day, this equates to 375 hours of Family Time per week.

The Family Time team currently carry out ~300 hours of contact per week. This suggests that there is already plenty of capacity in existing spaces to carry out all Family Time activities.

Therefore, with appropriate consideration to ensure that rooms are decorated to cater to different age ranges and needs, good awareness of rooms and a good booking system, the service should have enough rooms to meet current capacity.

There is potential to increase the number of hours that can be facilitated for Family Time per week in the existing Hubs by 33%. This result comes from just 1 additional evening hour per week. However, there are logistical issues that may make this difficult. Therefore, additional rooms would be needed to increase capacity. However, no viable repurposing opportunities have been identified, and additional capacity is unlikely to be required with improvements in awareness and booking systems.

Capacity for Expanded Family Time Sessions with Extended Opening Hours of Hubs



- Kingsway Family Hub
- Warrington Road Children's Centre
- Halton Lodge
- Halton Brook
- Brookvale Children's Centre
- Windmill Hill Children's Centre
- Ditton Community & Children's Centre
- Upton Children's Centre
- Glendale Centre

5. Space Provision Scenarios

HALTON PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2025-28

Following the development of the Halton Placement Sufficiency Strategy, work has been undertaken to establish a list of schemes that will be taken forward to create more bedspaces in residential care for Children Looked After that are owned by the Council. These have been summarised below. This includes care leavers accommodation and a Care Leavers Hub that would not provide bedspace.

Site	Capacity	HBC Estimated Capital Investment	Target Use	£ Per Week per placement	Online by	Stage	Milestones
Juno home 1- 14 Summer Lane	3 Beds	£0.0m	Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties/LD dual registered home (awaiting registration)	£5250 - £5750	May- 26 (pending registration)	Renovation, Partner led	Building work started. Registration Submitted
Juno home 2- Offer made on home in Widnes, awaiting acceptance	3 beds	£0.0m	TBD	£5250 - £5750	Proposed November 26	Purchase, Partner led	
Halton Home 1- to be in Widnes Likely purchase. Possible Development.	2/3 beds	£.550m for property acquisition, Stamp Duty (or equivalent tax), Valuation Fee, Survey Costs, Legal & Administrative Fees, Conveyancing Fees, Land Registry and search Fees. Additional costs- fire alarm, fixtures and fittings		£5250 - £5750			

5. Space Provision Scenarios

HALTON PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2025-28

Site	Capacity	HBC Estimated Capital Investment	Target Use	£ Per Week per placement	Online by	Stage
Rutland Street	3 Beds	£0.600m Cost of development and associated costs (as above)	Specialism to be decided	£5250 - £5750	Autumn 2028	Regen Concept
Appleton Village / Park House	3 Beds	£0.099m	Care Leaver Focus (16-18 years)	-	Spring 2026	Lease transfer/HBC owned property
18+ Supported Accommodation Development 1	10 Flats	£0.150m	Care Leaver Focus (16-18 years)	-	Autumn 2026	Lease transfer/RP property currently being used for another provision
18+ Supported Accommodation Development 2	10 Flats	£0.100m	Care Leaver focus (aged 18 plus)	-	Summer 2028	Concept Stage
Care Leavers Hub	4 rooms for direct work and staff office	£.250	Care Leaver Team	-	Unknown	Concept/stage

5. Space Provision Scenarios

SUMMARY

Whilst the child age population is projected to decrease, referrals and the need to assess cases is set to increase, and there is estimated to be more Children in Need in the borough. Those that are in need are likely to be of the most severe cases.

For this reason, it can be assumed that more Council resource is needed to support these cases for longer periods of time, and more children could become Children Looked After.

At the same time, implantation of the FFP and a greater focus on Early Help to reduce the severity of future Child in Need cases, increases the importances of the Family Hubs and an integrated workforce out in the community.

To achieve this, social workers will need to integrate into using desk space flexibly across the Family Hubs. The most cost-effective way to do this would be to implement good hot desking practice and a sound desk booking system alongside hybrid working. This also requires a significant culture change to ensure different teams across the service feel welcome in flexible spaces and good awareness of the desk space available.

There are also options identified to repurpose existing space into desk space in Family Hubs – particularly in Kingsway Family Hub, Ditton Family Hub and Warrington Road Family Hub.

The Council currently only has one owned accommodation facility for Children Looked After – Inglefield, and a couple of care leavers flat. This means the Council is facing high costs placing a large number of children in private accommodation and outside of the borough, which creates further issues in the future for these children as they become Care Leavers.

To solve this issue, a new local authority provision of accommodation for Children

Looked After will be required, on top of existing schemes identified through the Placement Sufficiency Strategy, this could be achieved through:

- Working with the Housing Regeneration Team to identify sites for constructing accommodation. They have a list of registered providers that would be willing to include accommodation for Children Looked After as part of their affordable home provision. The Regen team require a specific brochure that can be shared with RPs which sets out exactly the specifications needed. Engagement with Halton Housing Partnership would be beneficial to this study.
- Repurpose existing Council assets / purchasing assets and converting into Children's Homes / Care Leaver flats.
- The draft Housing Strategy has identified the potential for a grant for foster carers to alter their homes to allow them to look after more children. This would be a relatively low cost way to work with existing foster carers, and allow more children to remain in the borough in a family setting. A similar grant scheme already exists for families living with disabilities. The Home Improvement Team have experience issuing the grant and the Property Team are able to oversee the conversions. Suggestion of a survey to existing foster carers to understand the interest in the scheme and a trial period.

6. Recommendations & Conclusions

An aerial photograph of a park featuring a winding lake with several sailboats docked. The park is surrounded by lush green trees and grassy areas. In the background, industrial buildings and a tall chimney are visible under a clear sky. The text '6. Recommendations & Conclusions' is overlaid in large white font on a semi-transparent dark grey background.

6. Recommendations & Conclusions

INTRODUCTION

This section presents our recommendations and conclusions to the report. This is broken down into:

1. Service delivery and space utilisation
2. Children's Accommodation
3. Out of scope ideas for future

Here we also test out the potential costs of the interventions listed.

OPTIONS ASSESSMENT

The process to finalise the overall recommendations and conclusions has involved testing a comprehensive list of options for each Children's Services asset with key stakeholders, resulting in the selection of a preferred option for each. Preferred options may differ to those set out initially in Section 5: Space Provision Scenarios, as they may have evolved through stakeholder engagement discussions. All options are high-level ideas and would require further consultation, feasibility, design and QS costings. Each preferred option has then been fed into the overall capital ask.

COST ASSUMPTIONS

In this section we test the potential costs of various recommendations. This is a high-level indicative cost estimate based on benchmarks only are not QS costings based on architect designs. As such there is potential for considerable variance.

The table sets out the current average benchmarked costs associated with refurbishment and repurposing works. This suggests that on average refurbishment works range from £500/sqm for the most basic office fit-out, including modest refurb and minimal structural changes. This ranges up to £2,000+/sqm for a more bespoke fit-out that requires a stronger design focus.

It should be noted that these figures do not account for potentially higher costs associated with Local Authority procured works.

We have also included a contingency allowance of 25% on total costs.

The following sections test the potential costs associated with various recommendations.

Item	Cost benchmark (£/sqm)
Basic fit-out	£500-800
Mid-level fit-out	£800-1,200
High-spec / bespoke	£1,200-2,000+

Source: [Office Fit Out Costs Benchmarks 2025](#)

6. Recommendations & Conclusions

1. SERVICE DELIVERY AND SPACE UTILISATION

Family Hubs

This report highlights that demand will increase for use of family hubs, meeting rooms, and family time rooms; and also utilisation of the family hubs to accommodate greater office space and joint working across teams. To do this will require repurposing works, to convert some spaces for use as offices, as well as general refurbishment works to ensure family hubs are set up and capable of accommodating cross team working. This aims to maximise the use of the family hubs for service delivery.

Based on average costs of £2,000 per sqm (high-spec/ bespoke refurbishment accounting for structural changes to buildings with a premium for Council procurement) for capital works to repurpose existing family hubs to create an additional 384 sqm office space / conferencing facilities, delivering an additional 83 desk spaces, the cost would be **£1,023,080 million**. In addition, £600 per sqm (basic fit-out costs including modest refurbishment work (e.g. flooring, decoration etc.) would be allocated for general refurbishment works on existing office space, or to make the family hubs more accessible to workers. This would cost a further **£363,540** taking the total capital ask to refurbish Family Hubs to maximise office space and multi-agency teams to **£1,461,711**.

In addition, assuming new desk spaces would require new equipment including monitors, desks, chairs and misc. equipment upgrades (~£900), this would add additional costs. These additional have been included within refurbishment cost where there are new desks being introduced into a building.

Rutland House

Rutland House is the main council office accommodating children's services and social work staff. On the Ground Floor it contains an important conference room facility, lobby and waiting area that is used for multi agency meetings and family conferences. This floor also contains the Placements team, disused space, a large corridor leading to the shopping precinct. Across the corridor are a number of vacant offices some of which were previously leased by solicitors. This is a crucial facility for

the adequate delivery of children's care services. The space is in need of upgrade. We understand that there are already plans from outside of Children's Services to invest in the refurbishing of high quality conference facilities and meeting rooms in the former solicitors' offices. These plans include conversion to 4 small meeting rooms for up to 4 people, and a large meeting room for up to 16 people. There will be one small area left for use as storage.

Children's Services use 1,177sqm of office floorspace for 232 desks. Reconfiguration and refurbishment of this space would cost £705,900.

Desk Booking And Agile Work

To maximise the use of existing assets for multi-agency teams, we recommend the provision of a desk and room booking system, and shift to more agile and flexible working patterns across the childcare and social work services teams. This will require both additional systems as well as a culture and behaviour change in ways of working. This does not mean the end to office based working, but rather maximises the potential for community based and flexible working patterns that maximise existing assets. This will require new desk and room booking software. The Governments recommended desk and room booking service (Bookinglab Limited) charges up to £50,000 per year for an unlimited desk, and room license. As this would be a Council-wide system it is **not included** in the capital proposal for Children's Services.

This costing does not consider staff resource and has not been tested with HBC's IT and systems teams for feasibility.

6. Recommendations & Conclusions

1. SERVICE DELIVERY AND SPACE UTILISATION

Summary of Preferred Options: Existing Office & Service Delivery Buildings

Building	Preferred Option
Rutland House	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make full use of existing space, with some investment to refurbish the office space. 2. Provision of high-quality conferencing facilities for multi-agency and high importance meetings, as well as community friendly service space.
Brookvale Family Hub	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invest in refurbishment of existing office space. 2. Add an extension to the side of the building to create more office space. 3. Introduce a 2/1 ratio hot desking policy with booking system. Based on 30 desks becoming hot desks.
Halton Brook Family Hub	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expand larger room to create open plan with 2 small offices. Currently underutilised space. Use the current parenting team office as service delivery space. 2. Invest in refurbishment and reconfiguration of existing office space. 3. Introduce a 2/1 ratio hot desking policy with booking system. Based on 11 desks becoming hot desks.
Halton Lodge Family Hub	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invest in refurbishment of existing office space. 2. Keep all 24 desks and introduce a 2/1 ratio hot desking policy with booking system. Based on 12 desks becoming hot desks.
Windmill Hill Family Hub	Do nothing.
Glendale Centre	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invest in refurbishment and reconfiguration of existing office space.
Ditton Family Hub	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invest in refurbishment of existing office space. 2. Create additional office space by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knocking through from the main office into the room next door that is currently used for external evening activities (or create a 'pack away' office) • Converting meeting room on the side of the youth centre to office space 3. Introduce a 2/1 hot desking system for all desks. Based on 21 desks becoming hot desks.
Kingsway Family Hub	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invest in refurbishment of existing office space and reconfigure existing space to fit in additional desks 2. Create additional desks by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merging Managers Office and 3 smaller offices connected to Children's Centre Office to create more open plan. This would allow for better space utilisation. 3. Convert the meeting rooms on the 1st floor into a Wides conferencing facility. This would require consultation with the Community Centre as Children's Service currently do not own this space. 4. Introduce a 2/1 ratio hot desking policy with booking system to all desks. Based on 32 desks becoming hot desks.
Warrington Road Family Hub	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invest in refurbishment of existing office space 2. Create additional desks by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knocking through small managers office into staff office and staff room to create one large open plan office. 3. Introduce a 2/1 ratio hot desking policy with booking system to all desks. 11 desks would become hot desks within this option 4. Conversion of Training Kitchen into conference facilities.
Upton Family Hub	Do nothing.
Municipal	Close the Municipal Building and establish a new base for the ICART / DAT team. This option has already been announced.

6. Recommendations & Conclusions

1. SERVICE DELIVERY AND SPACE UTILISATION

Summary of Preferred Options: Existing Office & Service Delivery Buildings

Building	Current Desks	New Total Desks	Additional Desks	New Staff Capacity	Additional Staff Capacity	Refurbishment Cost	Repurposing Cost	Total Cost
Rutland House	232	239	+7	239	+7	£705,900	-	£705,900
Brookvale Family Hub	20	60	+40	90	+70	£82,516	£370,000	£452,516
Halton Brook Family Hub	13	22	+9	33	+20	£15,275	£109,200	£124,475
Halton Lodge Family Hub	24	24	0	36	+12	£45,900	-	£45,900
Windmill Hill Family Hub	6	6	0	6	0	-	-	-
Glendale Centre	25	29	+4	29	+4	£80,400	-	£80,400
Ditton Family Hub	20	41	+21	62	+42	£75,591	£150,220	£225,811
Kingsway Family Hub	35	64	+29	96	+61	£111,524	£180,060	£291,584
Warrington Road Family Hub	16	23	+7	34	+18	£27,425	£213,600	£241,025
Upton Family Hub	2	2	0	2	0	-	-	-
Municipal	49	0	-49	0	-49	-	-	-
Total	442	510	117	628	186	£1,144,531	£1,023,080	£2,167,611

6. Recommendations & Conclusions

1. SERVICE DELIVERY AND SPACE UTILISATION

Edinburgh Road Refurbishment

Edinburgh Road is a vacant, council owned, detached property near Widnes. The property was previously used as children's accommodation. While it could be refurbished to provide additional children's accommodation, and would be suitable to accommodate up to 5 residents in a homely setting, it could also be used as service space, including family time space, as well as meeting rooms for conferences. It sits on a large plot, and could be converted to provide sufficient parking onsite.

Based on a total site area, and additional internal area totalling 120 sqm, and at a high refurbishment cost of £2,000 per sqm (due to length of time vacant), this could cost in the region of **£250,000 to convert**.

Inglefield

Inglefield Children's Centre is a large and complex facility. It accommodates children with disabilities and complex needs for respite care and overnight stays. It requires high space standards, as well as adequate rooms to cater for overnight staff accommodation and disability access. It is attached to the Halton Women's Centre and Lavender House.

There are a number of internal service areas, parking spaces, open spaces, corridors and access routes which mean that the building is of inefficient design. A potential option would be the demolition and redevelopment of the site to maximise the space and provide a bespoke and tailored facility to accommodate the diverse needs of the community. In total the site area covers 0.387 ha.

It is also located adjacent to the former Fiddlers Three pub site, which has been demolished and cleared. This could create a site of approximately 0.67 ha which could provide capacity for a significant facility.

Assuming a plot ratio of 40%; a two and three storey development; internal area for rooms of 60%; an allowance of 90sqm per room; and average costs of £2,500 and £2,800 per sqm.

The scheme could potentially accommodate between **20 and 27 units** with ample additional space for community use.

This could cost between **£13.2 million and £19.0 million, equivalent to £0.6 and £0.7 million per additional room.**

Should 50% of these rooms be rented out / made available for out of area use, and charged at a rate of £800 per week, with 80% occupancy this would generate between £330,000 and £450,000 per annum. Based on the cost for development this would achieve a payback period of between 39 and 42 years.

Based on this estimate it is unlikely to provide value for money, unless higher density delivery options are considered. Higher density could certainly be achieved onsite should their be appetite for further investigation.

During stakeholder engagement, it was agreed that the preferred option for Inglefield at this stage is to **do nothing**.

6. Recommendations & Conclusions

1. SERVICE DELIVERY AND SPACE UTILISATION

Lavendar House

Lavender House is an existing 3 bed independent living unit for care leavers age 16 to 18. It is attached to but run separately by P3 Charity. In its current form it is not suitable for its current use, and there are other facilities better suited to independent living units.

There is the potential for the existing services to be relocated and the building to be converted and brought into the current facility for use as respite accommodation for children, as an extension to Inglefield. This could include those from outside of the area, which could provide an income stream to council to reinvest in children services. Stakeholder engagement also established a desire to open Lavendar House 7 days a week

The building current covers 150 sqm, and with conversion costs of ~£2,000 per sqm (as an existing in use asset which could be easily converted) could cost in the region of **£300,000** to convert.

Care Leavers Hub

The final project proposed under service delivery is the development of a Care Leavers Hub, providing rooms for direct work with care leavers and some office space. Whilst a site/asset has not yet been identified for this, a high level cost assumption for the delivery of this is **£250,000**.

2. ACCOMMODATION SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY

The following table provides an overview of the key projects identified in the Accommodation Sufficiency Strategy. The analysis presented in this report highlights the significant shortfall in HBC's provision of children's accommodation which is an urgent need.

This identifies 7 projects which could deliver 32 children's accommodation spaces, with a total capital cost of £1.65 million, equivalent to £51,563 per unit.

Site	Capacity	HBC Estimated Capital Investment
Juno home 1- 14 Summer Lane	3 Beds	£0.0m
Juno home 2- Offer made on home in Widnes	3 beds	£0.0m
Halton Home 1- to be in Widnes	2/3 beds	£.550m
Rutland Street	3 Beds	£0.600m
18+ Supported Accommodation Development 1	10 Flats (care leavers)	£0.150m
18+ Supported Accommodation Development 2	10 Flats	£0.100m
Appleton Village / Park House	3 beds (care leavers)	£0.250m
Total	32	£1.65 million

6. Recommendations & Conclusions

SUMMARY

This analysis has shown that there is increasing demand for children's accommodation services in Halton. This includes both new accommodation provision, but also the importance of maximising the use of existing assets, including the family hubs and office space, for both delivery of increased children's service activities and capacity, and also the efficiency of service delivery.

To do this we have identified the need for:

1. Service delivery and space utilisation

- Repurpose and refurbish Family Hubs to include expanded office provision and support multi-agency, community-based services
- Implement desk and room booking, as well as equipment and training to maximise the use of all council assets and support flexible, agile and remote working across teams
- Repurpose and invest in crucial conferencing space at Rutland House and create conferencing facilities in Widnes
- Maximise the use of current vacant assets such as Edinburgh Road for service delivery

2. Children's Accommodation

- Maximise the use of current vacant assets such as Appleton Village / Park House for potential independent living units
- Repurposing of Lavender House to increase the capacity for care
- Support the Accommodation Sufficiency Strategy to deliver up to an additional 32 bed spaces across 7 sites

The potential costs associated with this strategy are listed below.

These costs are high-level benchmarks that are not RICS accredited or developed by a regulated financial advisor (FCA) / QS consultant. They are based on high-level ideas using floorplans and have not been designed by an architect. They are intended to give a broad benchmark of what costs may look like, but next steps will require feasibility testing, architect designs and QS costings.

Contingency of 25% has been included, as well as £100,000 per year (over a 3-year programme) for implementation costs that would involve bringing in external expertise to manage the overall project.

Project	Indicative Cost Estimate
1. Service delivery and space utilisation	
Family Hub Upgrades	£1,461,711
Rutland House	£705,900
Edinburgh Road	£250,000
Lavendar House	£300,000
Care Leavers Hub	£250,000
Sub-total	£ 2,967,611
2. Children's Accommodation	
Accommodation Sufficiency Strategy	£1,650,000
Sub-Total	£ 4,617,611
Contingency (25%)	£1,154,403
Implementation Costs (over 3 years)	£300,000
Total	£6,072,014