



Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2025-2028

Children's Social Care March 2025

**All children in care and young people will have everything that a good parent
would want for their own children**

Halton's Present - Halton's Future

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

Halton Council is committed to being the best corporate parent it can be, to the children in its care and into early adulthood. This strategy contains the most recent annualised information available and refers to key local and national information.

This strategy aims to improve outcomes for children in care and care leavers through the provision of a sufficient number and range of high-quality placements and accommodation options. It also describes how the Council will work with partners over the next three years to meet the statutory 'Sufficiency Duty' set out in legislation.

Primarily, our Sufficiency Duty contributes to improving outcomes for children and young people, ensuring that they have the best start in life, feel loved and be cared for. Having a sufficient number and range of local placements, that provide high quality care, is good for children and young people. It gives them a sense of belonging and promotes their continued relationships with family, friends and school. As they grow toward adulthood, it helps them stay in touch and get support from those people who have been important to them.

In addition, the success in delivering this strategy will support significant cost savings for the Council. This is because managing our commissioning and provision of placements can improve the quality and value for money.

There have been a number of internal structural, local and national sector changes since the previous strategy. The greatest impact on the success of the previous sufficiency strategy and Halton's ability to achieve what we set out to do, has been the increase year on year of the number of Children in Care. This has resulted in a need to review and revise the aims and objectives of this strategy while continuing to strive towards our intended goal to increase the number, type and quality of placements.

In addition, children, and those with care experience, have told us they would like more choice in where they live, who they live with, and how they are cared for. At the Corporate Parenting Board, the Children in Care Council gave a clear message that this should be one of the corporate parenting priorities. This strategy has further been endorsed by the Children in Care Council.

National Context

While Halton recognise the internal issues with sufficiency, we also recognise that national research and reviews have highlighted increased demand and consequent cost pressures on local authorities across England, particularly in terms of adolescent entrants into care, and the complexity of their needs (Holmes, Forthcoming). There are also growing concerns about the use of unregulated and unregistered placements (Greatbatch and Tate, 2020).

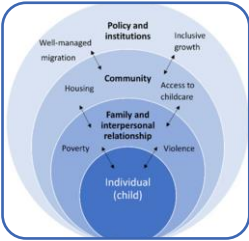
The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) undertook a year-long review into independent provision of children's placements which concluded in March 2022. The report raised a number of concerns about profit margins and debt in the sector. The CMA report made recommendations about how the market could be governed and managed in the future by a change in regulations and bringing some services in house. It recognised the competition between local authorities for scarce resources, while the number of children in care was increasing, and increased costs while suggesting potential solutions. The report was welcomed by the sector but as yet there is no change in the current arrangements.

The Care Review, chaired by Josh MacAlister, has also made a number of proposals and recommendations that promote keeping families together, increasing the use of kinship

arrangements and a fairer, more equitable, and inclusive care system. The government launched a consultation on the strategy in response to this, and other reviews, entitled '[Stable Homes Built on Love](#)'. In this strategy a number of recommendations have been accepted.


1.2 Legislation – the Sufficiency Duty

The sufficiency duty sets out a requirement for local authorities to “*systematically review the current situation in relation to ensuring sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of Children in Care/Young People and Care Leavers*”.




Care Planning

The sufficiency duty must be seen as part of a mechanism that provides young people with the most appropriate placement to meet their needs and improve their outcomes through quality assessments, care planning and decision making. The guidance also advocates strengthening the links between practitioners working with individual Children in Care and staff with responsibility for the commissioning function.



Early Help

The sufficiency duty statutory guidance acknowledges the importance of taking earlier action to support children and families to prevent children becoming looked after. This is through the provision of preventive and early intervention services to reduce the need for care proceedings as well as through clear robust links into universal and targeted services.



Sufficiency

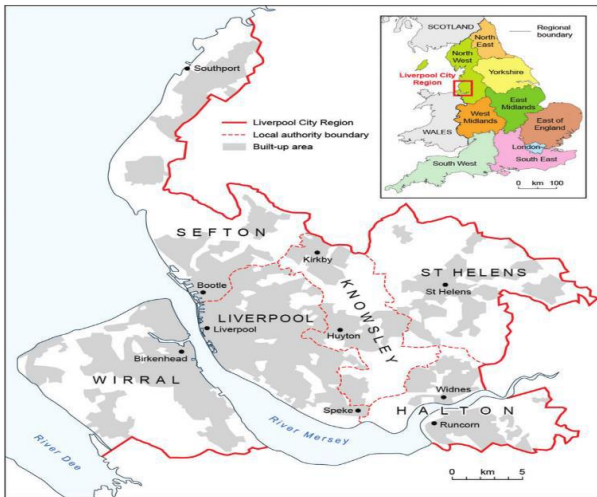
Local Authorities need to assess existing commissioning practice and identify how to ensure that services commissioned out of borough from the Local Authority can in future be delivered more locally, wherever this is practically possible and providing it is consistent with the child's welfare. Although the sufficiency duty lies with the local authority, the duty will be implemented most effectively through a partnership between the local authority and its stakeholders.

The guidance is also clear that local authorities should not move children from out of authority placements for the sole purpose of meeting the sufficiency duty if their needs are being well met by the existing range of services involved.

1.3 The Halton Context

Halton is a largely urban area; its two biggest towns are Widnes and Runcorn which face each other across the River Mersey, Ten miles upstream from Liverpool. The population of Halton has recently started to increase, in part due to a concerted effort to build new houses, as well as increased inward migration.

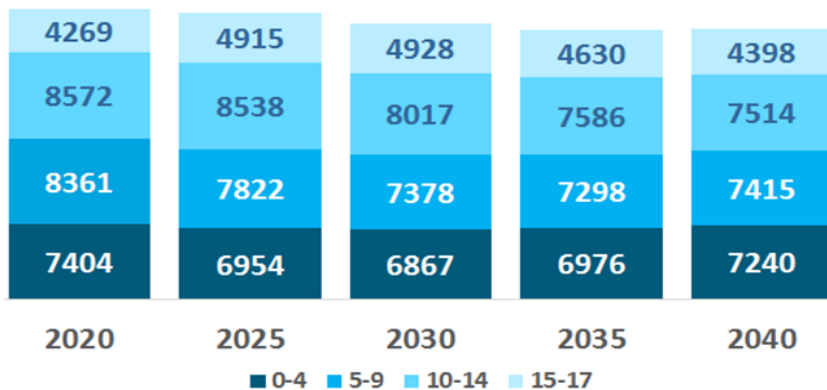
Halton is also part of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.



The current estimate of Halton’s population is 128,500 (2021, ONS). Breaking down Halton’s population by age shows that the borough has a slightly higher proportion of children and young people aged 0-24 than commonly found across England and Wales. (30.3% compared to 30.1%).

Between the last two censuses (held in 2011 and 2021) Halton’s estimated population growth (2.2%) during this time is less than Northwest England as a whole (5.2%) and significantly less than the National growth (6.6%).

The age breakdown of Halton’s population is expected to change over the next two decades. The proportion of people over the age of 70 is expected to swell and the proportion of children and people of working age is expected to contract.



By 2030, there is expected to be 1417 less people under the age of 18.

By 2040, there is expected to be 2040 less people under the age of 18.

The Borough is currently ranked as the 23rd most deprived local authority in England. Almost 1 in 5 children aged under 16 in Halton live in relative low-income households (19.6%), which is slightly higher than the England average (19.1%).

Unfortunately, this proportion has increased in recent years, both locally and nationally.

1.4 Halton Children in Care and Care Leavers

The number of children in care in Halton has been increasing and they have been remaining in care for longer. The in-house provision available has not been able to keep pace with this demand. The Council also does not have as much in-house fostering capacity as it needs. The range of regulated care leavers accommodation is growing but a continued focus on

suitable resources is needed in this area, following the introduction of the Supported Accommodation Regulations in October 2023.

The population of Children in Care as of April 2024 stood at 383, this evidences a slight decrease in numbers when compared to April 2023 (385 Children in Care), however our rate per 10,000 as of April 2024 is 139, placing us higher than our comparators.

We want children to live locally with family members wherever possible, and have access to local services that provide for their long-term health, mental health, education, plus any identified specialist needs. Where this is not possible, we need a range of placements, including foster carers, childrens homes and supported accommodation, to provide nurturing and safe care and support, as close to Halton as possible.

Not having the right number and type of placements locally has meant that some children have been placed outside of Halton, and we have an over reliance on independent fostering agency carers and residential provision to meet our placement needs.

This Sufficiency Strategy seeks as far as possible to address these issues.

1.5 What Children and Young People Told Us

We know that older children in care and care leavers have told us consistently that the range and quality of accommodation for care leavers is not adequate. They want to have choices about who they live with and to always consider if they can go home to family.

Most children in care tell us that they have a preference for foster care over residential care, though a very small number say they prefer the option of residential care. Halton's position is that family-based care is always considered first, and, regularly reviewed as a step down placement for those currently in residential care.

2. Our Vision

2.1 The Children and Young Peoples Plan and alignment with other strategies.

This strategy sets out our approach to providing the *right placements in the right place at the right time* for all of our children in care and care leavers.

It is also essential for delivery of the objectives in the Care Leavers Local Offer ([Care Leavers Local Offer | Local Offer](#))

This strategy also incorporates the Aiming High principles of the Children and Young Peoples Partnership Plan 2024-2027. [Halton CYPP FINAL.pdf](#)

The graphic is a vertical stack of four colored boxes with text. The top box is blue and contains the word 'VISION' in orange, followed by 'WHAT WE DO EVERY DAY AND THE OUTCOMES WE WILL ACHIEVE TOGETHER' in white, the 'AIMING HIGH' logo, and 'WE ENSURE THAT ALL CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SAFE - HAPPY - HEALTHY - SUCCEEDING' in white. The second box is yellow and contains the word 'PURPOSE' in green, followed by 'WHY WE ARE ALL HERE' and 'SUPPORTING CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & FAMILIES' in green. The third box is green and contains the word 'CHALLENGES' in white, followed by 'THOSE THINGS THAT ARE MOST DETRIMENTAL TO OUR CHILDREN'S LIVES AND FUTURES' and 'POVERTY - HEALTH - NEGLECT - EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT' in white. The bottom section is split into two pink boxes: 'OUR STRATEGIC ENABLERS' with 'WHAT WE MUST FOCUS ON' and 'Working in partnership', 'Developing the workforce', and 'Raising our aspirations'; and 'OUR TOP PRIORITIES' with 'WHAT WILL MAKE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE, QUICKLY' and 'Prevention and Early Intervention', 'Improving Professional Practice', and 'Increasing Education Attendance'.

2.2 What we want to achieve.

Our vision in relation to placement provision for children in care and care leavers includes:

Halton's children will always be supported to stay with, or return to their families and communities, wherever it is safe to do so.

For those children who cannot return home, we will achieve permanency within their family network, adoption, special guardianship and approved long term fostering at the earliest opportunity.

Residential care will only be chosen in exceptional circumstances and for short periods.

We will endeavour to ensure that Halton's children will live locally, in the Borough area boundary or within 20 miles.

They will know about a placement household and the carer before they move in and where possible, will have a choice of carer.

We will improve the timeliness of adoption.

Children in foster care will be supported to 'stay put' with their carer beyond age 18.

Young People 16 and over will have access to a range of suitable supported accommodation.

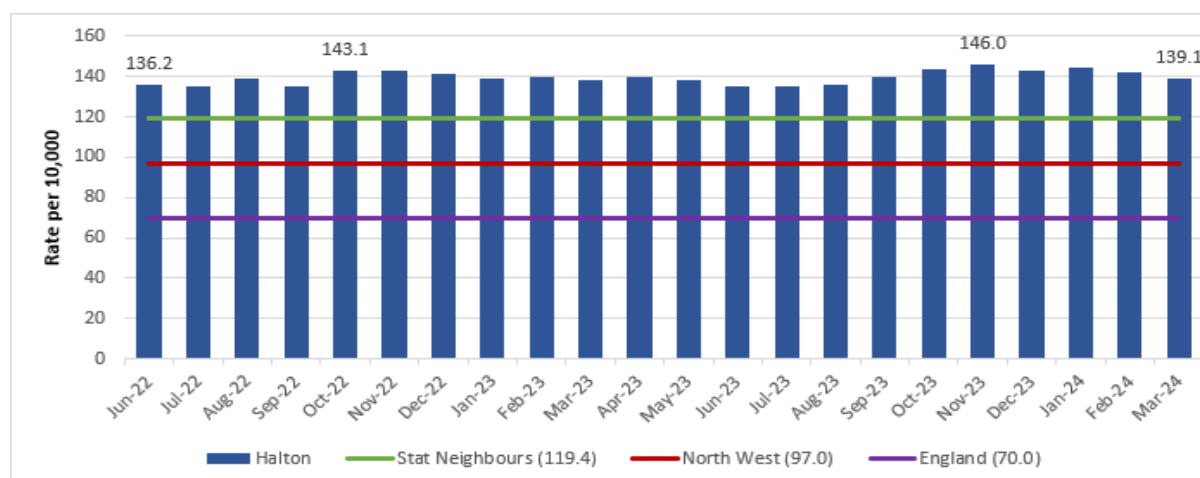
We will improve care planning for all children and utilise commissioning and partnership working to support the development of sufficiency and to ensure we achieve the outcomes in this strategy.

3. Placement Needs Analysis

We have undertaken a placement needs analysis to inform this placement sufficiency strategy. This section summarises the main findings from the analysis.

3.1 Current Profile of Children in Care

Children in Care (CIC) rate has been fluctuating since June 2022, with our highest rate being 146 in November 2023. As of March 2024, there were 139 Halton children in care. The majority of the children entering care had abuse or neglect recorded as the primary need.



The number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) has started to decline in recent months, with our current figure being 17 in January 2025 (8% of our CIC population) and our highest month being September 2023 at 22 (10.5% of our population).

Halton continue to promote parents and family as the best option for permanency for a child and work is ongoing to strengthen the early help offer, and therefore prevent children coming into care. Halton have 10% of children in care who are placed with their own parents on a Care Order as of January 2025.

Currently, the gender split within the children in care population is 52% male, 48% female. 93% of children in care in Halton are White British. There are 27 (7%) children being identified from a different ethnic background. 34 (9%) children in care have a disability recorded.

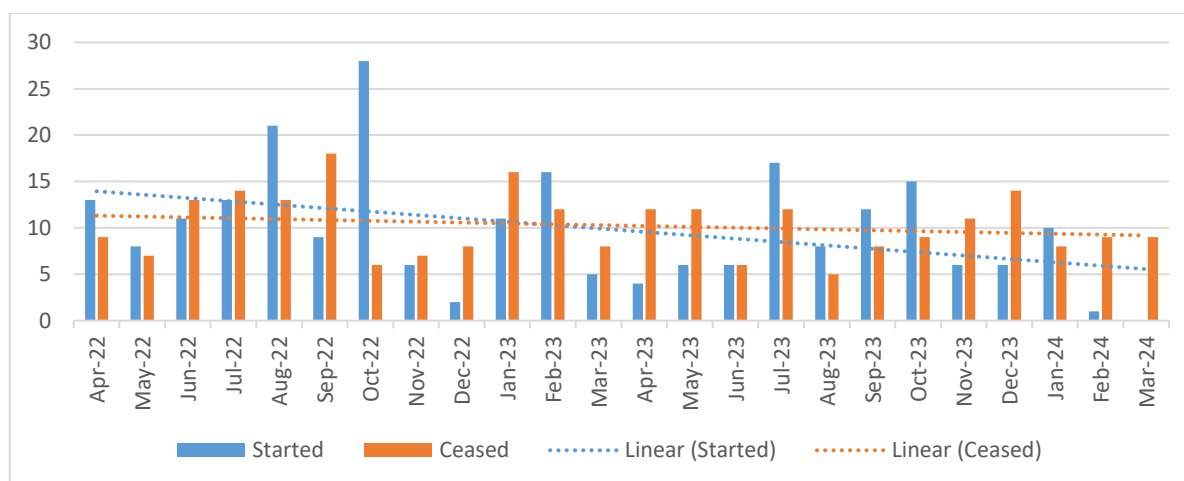
The age breakdown of children in care at the end of March 2024 was as follows:

Age 0 to 4 – 84 children (22 %). National average comparator 18%
Age 5 to 9 – 79 children (21 %). National average comparator 18%
Age 10 to 15 – 147 children (38 %). National average comparator 38%
Age 16 and over – 73 children (19 %). National average comparator 26%

The CIC numbers have remained high, but steady, with a reducing trend. The primary reason why children and young people left care was because they returned home to live with parents/relatives (23 children). 12 Children left with a special guardianship order. We track and monitor children who have a plan to return to the family on a monthly basis to avoid drift and delay.

During the reporting year April 2023 – March 2024, 120 children left the care system, which was a 9% reduction on the previous year. 10 were discharged from care into successful adoptions.

The graph below illustrates the reducing trend for ceasing and starting over the last 2 years from April 2022 to April 2024.



Performance of the number of days taken to move through the adoption process is measured in the Adoption Scorecard, and this is measured over a three-year average.

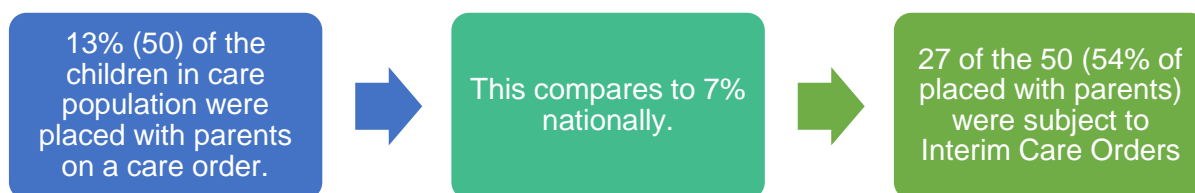
For the number of days from entering care to placement with prospective adopters, and the number of days from Placement Order to match with prospective adopters, Halton has been reducing the average.

3.2 Placement Demand

77% of Halton's children in care were living in a family environment at the end of March 2024. This includes those in house and external foster care, those living at home with parents and placed with relatives or a friend, or placed for adoption.



At 31 March 2024, 13% of young people (49) were placed in residential care provision, identical when compared to the national average. All of these children were placed externally to Halton. Five children were placed for adoption, which equates to 1.3% of the children in care population.



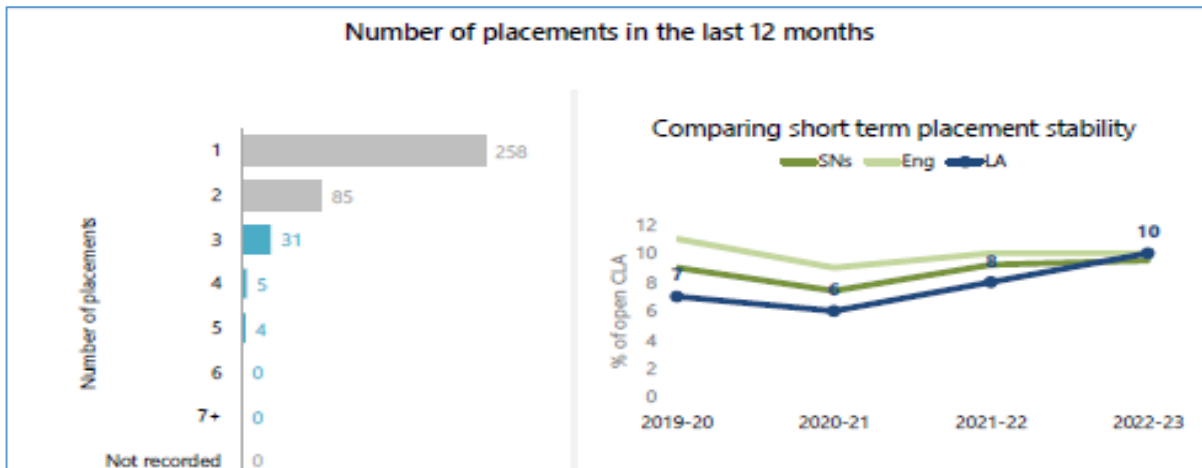
The number of Care Leavers in Halton has historically been around 75 at any one time. However, due to recent year's increases in the number of children in care, particularly the number of older young people entering the care system, and unaccompanied asylum seekers, the number of care leavers has risen.

In January 2024, there were 79 eligible Care Leavers open to the service, however this figure is expected to rise over the next two years. It is anticipated additional children in care will become Care Leavers before 2026, and currently 18 Care Leavers aged 21-25 using our extended offer service.

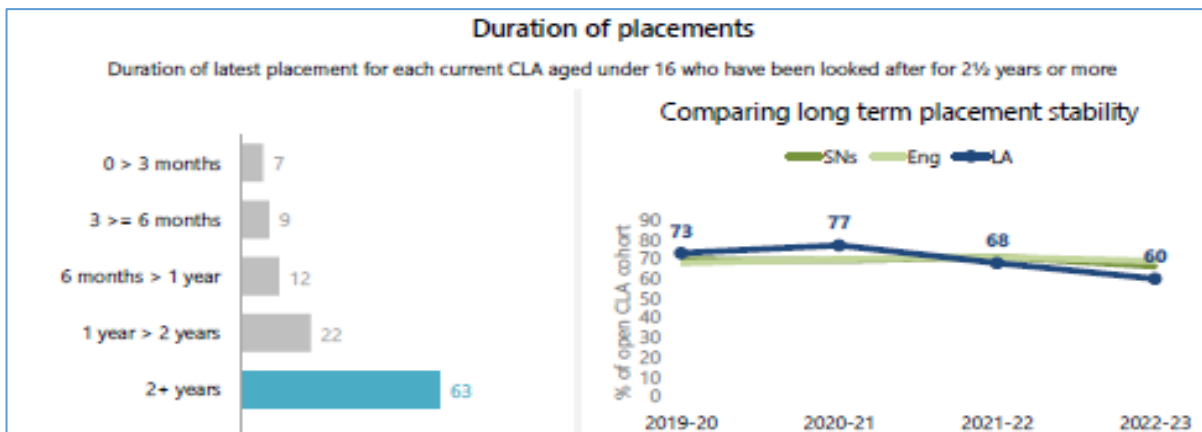
Halton joined Together 4 Adoption regional adoption agency (RAA) in September 2017. Together 4 Adoption complete the work for all adoptions wherever possible but on occasions it is necessary to spread the net further to other regional adoption agencies. As of end of March 2024, 4 children were in 'placed for adoption' with a Placement Order. There were also 26 children with a permanence plan of adoption.

3.3 Placement Stability

Performance for stable placements of over 3 years, at the end of March 2024 looks in line for the previous year's trend, at 10.4% (40 children). Halton has been in line with comparators for the previous three years by supporting placements and preventing breakdown where possible.

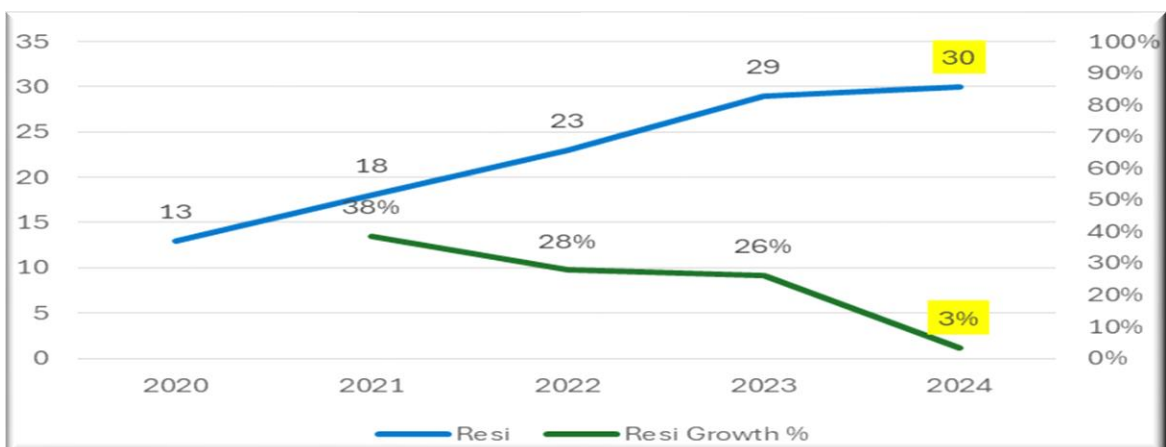


At the end of March 2024, 63% of Children in Care were looked after for 2+ years in the same placement. This remains a focus with a new permanency panel to ensure children are in their long-term arrangement at the earliest opportunity.



3.4 Projected Children in Care - Population and Profile

This strategy aims to safely contribute to our vision that more children will remain at home, be returned home, or placed in family-based care. It aims for fewer children in residential care, with more children placed in local internal resources, rather externally commissioned IFA, Residential or Supported Accommodation provision.



Since 2020 there has continually been steady growth in the number of new placements required, compared to the previous year. Halton are currently forecasting that this growth in new placements has plateaued for 2024/25 when compared to 2023/24. With the exception of some, the majority of new placements are within the parameters of national average placement rates as per the Children’s Homes Association (CHA) expectations.

We will be seeking to reduce admissions of adolescents by focusing on early help and a restructure of services, through a dedicated edge of care lens. We know too many children are coming into care where there is potential that they could have been better supported to remain living within their families.

We are not projecting a reduction in young children aged under four coming into care and will be seeking to secure very early permanence for all young children admitted to care, and anticipate increasing numbers of adoption placements over each year of this strategy.

Our numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Halton has been recently decreasing, and we now have 8% (17) of our children in care population defined as UASC. Our highest numbers in the last year has been 10.5% (29). We will continue to provide services for these young people, primarily in family-based placements and supported accommodation for those of leaving care age.

We anticipate that demand for Supported Accommodation will increase over the next year, given the increased numbers of children in care aged 16/17 at present. However, if we succeed in reducing our children in care population overall, in particular in reducing admissions of adolescents, the result will be a corresponding reduction in demand for care/support by the latter stages of this strategy.

We now provide Staying Put foster care, Supported Lodgings and locally sourced Supported Accommodation placements for increasing numbers of care leavers and working effectively with local registered social landlords (RSL’s).

3.5 Placement Costs

The average weekly unit costs per child in each different placement type is as below:

Fostering	•£983.33 - Average IFA
Residential	•£4227.67 - Average Residential
Supported Accommodation	•£1548.49 - Average Supported Accommodation

In-house foster carer placements are by far the most cost-efficient placement option and residential provision, of any kind, is the most expensive. Halton Council aim to place more children in foster care, with particular focus on in-house foster care, which will support achievement of significant cost efficiencies.

The cost of Supported Accommodation is increasing rapidly and we aim to both develop our in-house Supported Lodgings Service and continue to build local relationships with our RSL’s

to provide a wider range of Supported Accommodation in borough, at less cost, to support care leavers moving forward.

3.6 Gap Analysis

At March 2024 Halton has a higher percentage of children in care placed with parents (10%) compared to the national average (8% in 2021-22). Although this has slightly decreased, new legal gateway arrangement and strengthened pre-proceedings and permanency arrangements, will seek to address this and prevent orders being necessary where children can safely remain with parents, and discharge orders where children are safely living with parents.

We will address the number of children in care placed in connected persons foster carer placements where a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) would ensure permanency outside care. Practice in this area needs strengthening to prevent drift and delays in care planning.

Referral analysis has shown that fostering placements are the greatest need within the 10-16 age range. A targeted recruitment campaign will be launched to attract prospective carers to provide safe and appropriate to care for older children.

On 31 March 2024, the Regional Adoption Agency 'Together for Adoption' had a total of 70 approved adopters whom have not yet had children placed with them. These approved adopters are available for all four local authorities in the regional arrangement. 10 of these approved prospective adopters are also registered as foster to adopt. We need to secure these placements faster.

There is insufficient provision of in-house foster carers, in addition to a lack of in borough residential placements for children. Market stimulation needs to attempt to address this, and Provider Engagement events and Forums need to be re-introduced.

There is a need to increase our use of Staying Put and Supported Lodging provision in the borough as this has been too low.

A wider and different range of Supported Accommodation is required to meet the diverse needs of care leavers, for example those with learning difficulties.

4. Supporting Children to Remain with Their Families

4.1 The Importance of Family

We believe that all children have the right to family life. A family offers children the permanence they need, promotes their identity and sense of belonging, whenever possible family should mean their own birth family. We define permanence as the securing of a child's physical, social and emotional wellbeing throughout childhood and into adulthood, and understand that this is achieved by the provision of consistent care, stable relationships, and a secure family base in life.

For the vast majority of children, being cared for in their birth family, whether in the immediate or with extended family, is the best way to meet their needs.

We recognise that children should be supported to live within their birth families and only in a small minority of cases, do children have to become looked after outside of their families and this should be for the



shortest time possible. We are planning our services to deliver excellent early help, edge of care and family support services that help to keep families together.

Research by the Department for Education and the Association of Directors of Children's Services has identified that in particular outcomes for adolescents entering care in their teens are on average, poor. This research informs our approach and aspirations to develop and deliver excellent edge of care services to adolescents and their families to support them to stay together.

4.2 What is Currently Working Well?

Halton has a number of systems and processes in place across Early Help which has supported the positive developments below:

Early Help

We work well with our Early Help services, and have a dedicated community support workers in our Child in Need social work teams offering intense support to children at the edge of care. We are embedding systemic family practice to Halton, with a focus on children with complex emotional and behavioural needs, this will further strengthen our edge of care offer through targeted evidence-based models of working. We have a multi-agency Early Help Strategy and a Neglect Strategy that have a positive impact.

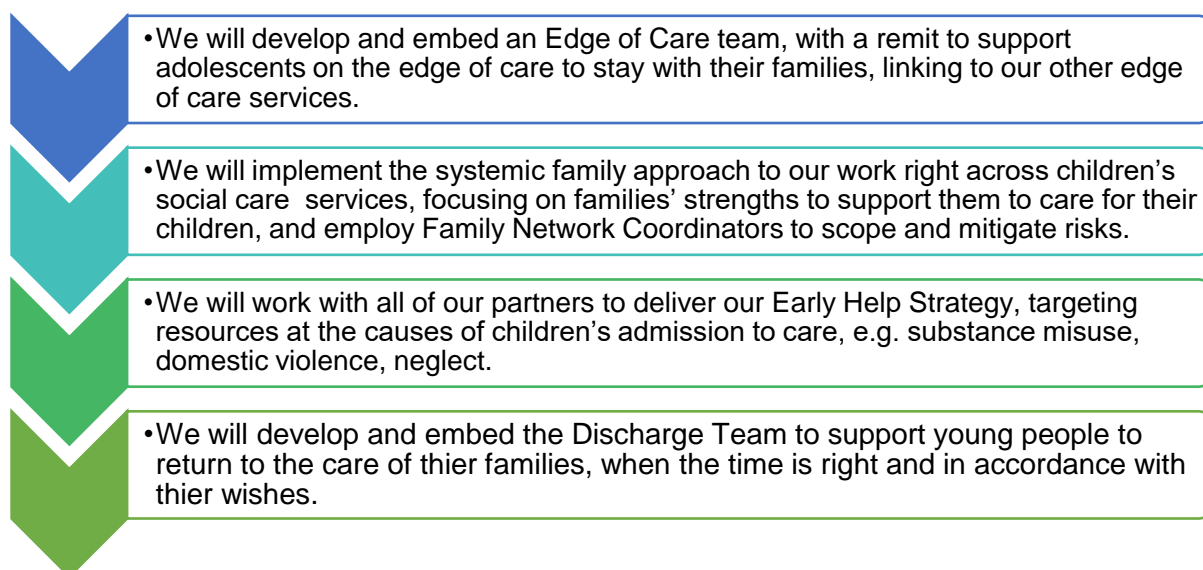
Special Guardianship

We will focus on converting our high numbers of 'connected persons' foster care these arrangements to SGO. The number of children who left care via SGO has been relatively stable (6 in 2019, and 7 in 2020). For the year to March 2023 there were 20 which has shown a marked increase.

Public Law Outline

We continue to improve our practice and use of the Public Law Outline process to work to support parents to avoid care proceedings and subsequent admission to care. It is a priority to reduce the overall numbers and length of time of proceedings.

4.3 Next Steps

- 
- We will develop and embed an Edge of Care team, with a remit to support adolescents on the edge of care to stay with their families, linking to our other edge of care services.
 - We will implement the systemic family approach to our work right across children's social care services, focusing on families' strengths to support them to care for their children, and employ Family Network Coordinators to scope and mitigate risks.
 - We will work with all of our partners to deliver our Early Help Strategy, targeting resources at the causes of children's admission to care, e.g. substance misuse, domestic violence, neglect.
 - We will develop and embed the Discharge Team to support young people to return to the care of their families, when the time is right and in accordance with their wishes.

As identified, we need to take further action to support children and their families so they can safely stay at, or return, home. This is especially important given the CMR and Care Review evidence indicating that outcomes for adolescents entering care are particularly poor.

5. Placement Planning for Disabled Children

5.1 The Importance of Planning for Disabled Children

Children with disabilities and their parents have a right to expect us to provide the same opportunities to local placements, family placements, and permanence, including permanence outside of care through adoption or Special Guardianship, as we do for other children in care.

There should not be an assumption for children with disabilities that adoption is unachievable for them, that their disability prevents them from being able to live in a foster family, or that it is more acceptable for them to be placed far away from their families and communities. In order to meet the needs of children with disabilities for local family placements and permanence, we need to understand their placement needs and plan placement provision specifically in response to these.

7.2 What is Working Well?

Internal Provision

Halton operates an overnight short breaks unit, Inglefield House, for children and young people with a range of disabilities, complex needs and behaviour. The regulated home is registered to take up to four children at any one time, under the age of 18 years of both genders, who have either physical or learning disabilities or sensory impairment. The children who receive this service have been assessed as being in need of short-term overnight care, away from the family home. Depending on the assessed level of need packages up to a maximum of 75 overnights a year may be delivered. The home is currently rated as Good by Ofsted following the last inspection. Additionally, there were 22 children and young people utilising our internal short breaks children's home, two of whom had child in need status.


Established Workforce and Integrated Working

We have a dedicated children with disability social worker in post and good links to our SEND team, and we have a robust SEND local offer.


Service Development

Halton are looking to develop an integrated 0-25 Disabilities Team, which will support young people into adulthood, and aid transitions from and between the services they need.


7.3 Next Steps




- We will actively target adopter recruitment activity at individuals and couples who could be a family for children with disabilities work with Together for Adoption, and recruit more short break and respite foster carers for children with disabilities to provide support to permanent fostering, adoption and Special Guardianship placements.



- We will work with independent sector residential providers to commission sufficient local/in Borough residential provision for the small number of disabled children who may require a residential placement, so as to ensure we do not have to place children at distance to meet their very special needs.



- We will promote a culture that recognises the right of disabled children to grow up in a family, developing a policy to fund home adaptations for foster carers and adopters where they are caring or propose to care for a child with disability where such an adaptation is necessary to meet the child's needs



- We will continue to work with Adults Social Care to explore and develop the 0-25 Disabilities Team, designed to better support young people of all ages through transition and beyond.

6. Local Family-Based Fostering Placements

6.1 The Importance of Local Family Based Placements

The Human Rights Act sets out the right to a family life. It is essential that our children experience the benefits of a family life, and we aim to ensure that the vast majority of our children reside in family-based fostering provision.

There will always be a small minority of older children who, because of their needs at a particular time in their life, cannot live in a family environment. We recognise that residential care can offer a short respite but is not suitable for long term family-based care.

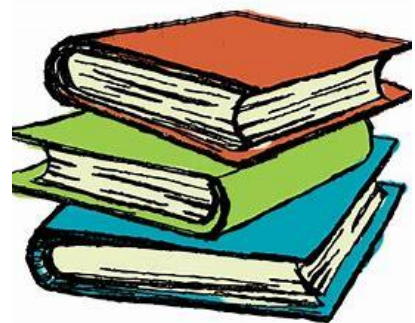


Where residential provision is used, it should be for a very small number of children and for the shortest possible time, as a means to prepare young people for living in a family.

We also want all of our children to be placed locally, close to their birth family, schools and communities. Placing children locally will support them to maintain relationships with family and friends and to continue in the same school.

We know that where children are placed locally, we and our partners in education and health are better able to support them and to monitor their progress. It also makes it easier for us to support them to engage with other children in care and ourselves about how we can improve their experiences and outcomes for them and other children in care.

Local family-based placements mean there is far less risk of developing an 'out of sight, out of mind' culture spoken about by Edward Timson, MP at the launch of the Children and Families Bill 2013, (Act of Parliament 2014).

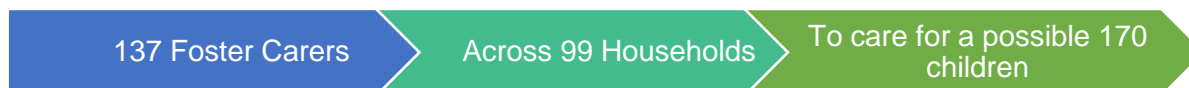


Halton are looking to improve in these areas over the course of this strategy and, to inform improvements, we need to recognise where we are already developing good practice.

6.2 What is Working Well?

Internal Fostering

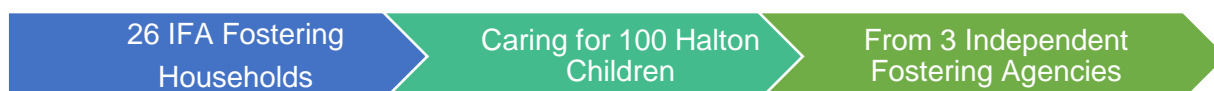
Within Halton Council's internal fostering service there are:



There are dedicated recruitment strategies and initiatives in place to build quantity and resilience across our internal provision, and we continue to provide a dedicated competitive offer to our carers.

Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA)

Halton Council utilises the regional North West Fostering Framework, operated by Placements North West and has the following access to IFA in borough:



There is also access to additional placements through the Framework across the Liverpool City Region, and the North West. Halton also leads the Liverpool City Region Provider Partnership Agreement, a regional Merseyside and Cheshire framework.

Fostering Recruitment

We are collaborating with neighbouring Cheshire authorities to enhance our marketing and recruitment of foster carers; this will mean we can reach more carers and attract more foster carers to Halton. In time this will increase our in-house fostering households and reduce our reliance on IFA and residential placements.

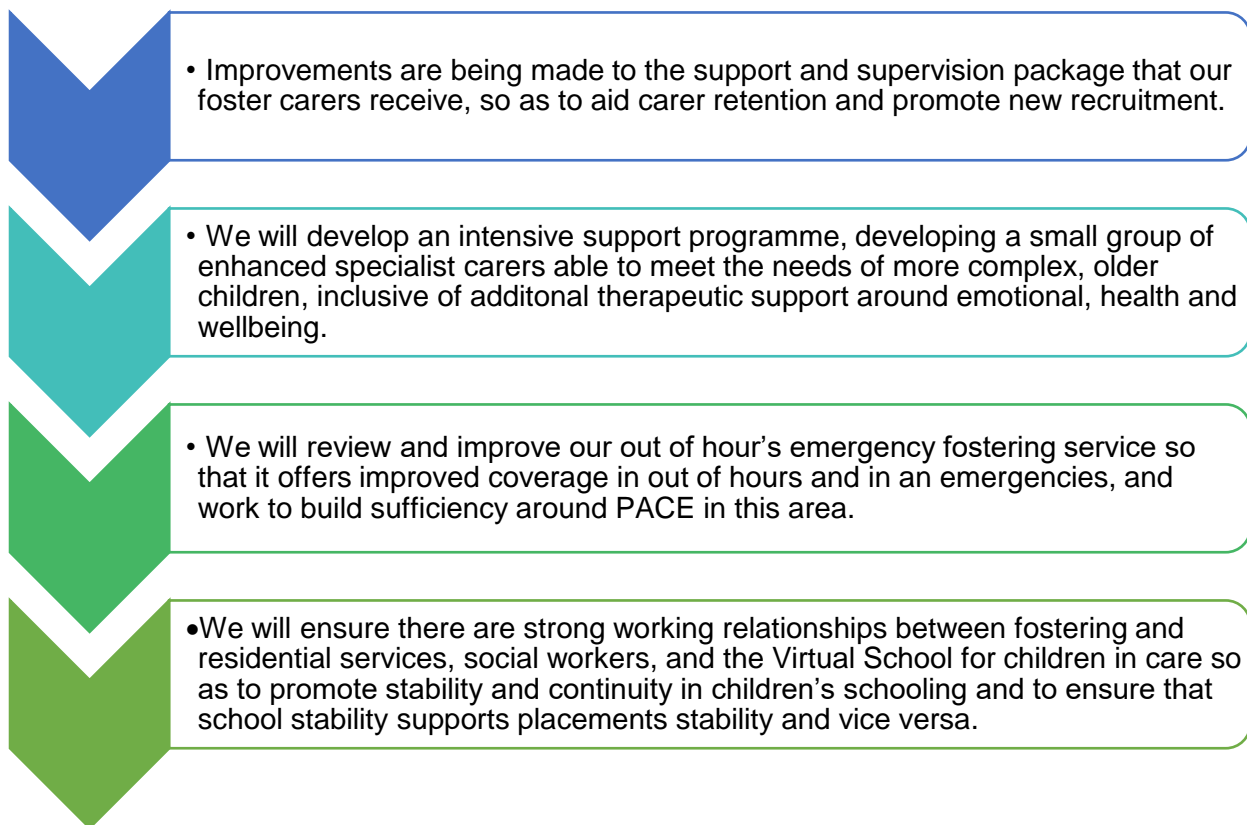
Halton approved an additional 16 fostering households (including connected person) during the reporting year to March 2023, including three mainstream households. We are having some success attracting experienced independent fostering agency carers to transfer to us and we will continue to respond and welcome interest from such carers.

Local Fostering Placements

66% (246) of children are placed in or within a 20-mile radius of Halton; this means we can provide local support services to meet identified needs.

6.3 Next Steps

It is essential to the delivery of this strategy that we develop a good in-house fostering service which is able to meet the placement needs of the majority of our children in care.



7. Residential Accommodation

7.1 The importance of Good Quality Residential Childrens Homes

For a number of years Halton had substantially more, privately owned, externally managed, residential provisions located within its boundary, than the number of places it commissioned. Given the regional increase in use of external residential placements, alongside lower cost of housing, cheaper labour and motorway access this is no longer the case.

We have strengthened our working practice alongside our Planning colleagues to ensure that providers are encouraged to engage with Commissioning prior to submitting any applications.

The Local Authority does not currently have any in-house Residential provision. All Residential placements are commissioned via the North West Residential Framework, operated by Placements North West and Trafford Council.

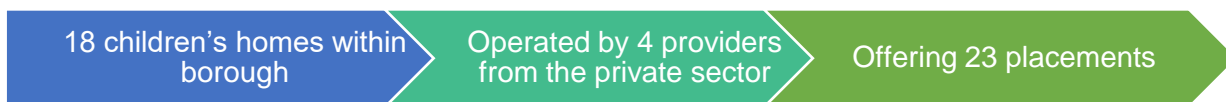
This means that we will have to review our use of independent providers, assess the outcomes children are achieving in these placements, understand these in the context of longer-term planning and wider market shaping.

7.2 What is working well?

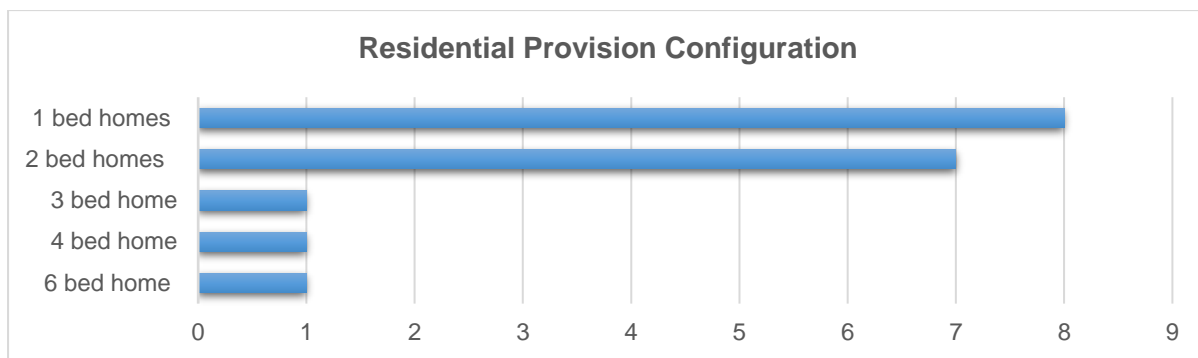
Residential Provision

There is a diverse pool of existing providers within Halton, who are available to provide placements for children and young people in their local area. These providers are open to engagement and collaboration to be innovative and work together to develop new approaches.

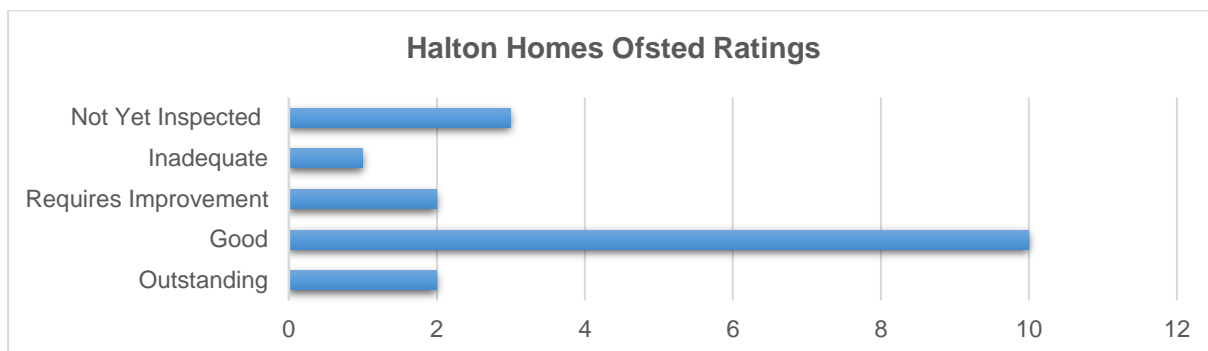
Local provision currently comprises of a high proportion of 1 and 2 bed homes, many of which are focussed on more complex placements, some of which are also used by authorities some distance from Halton. There are currently a total of:



The majority of the locally based provision is registered to meet emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD) needs 10-18 years, with 1 provision being registered to meet disability needs. The Halton residential provider market is made up of:



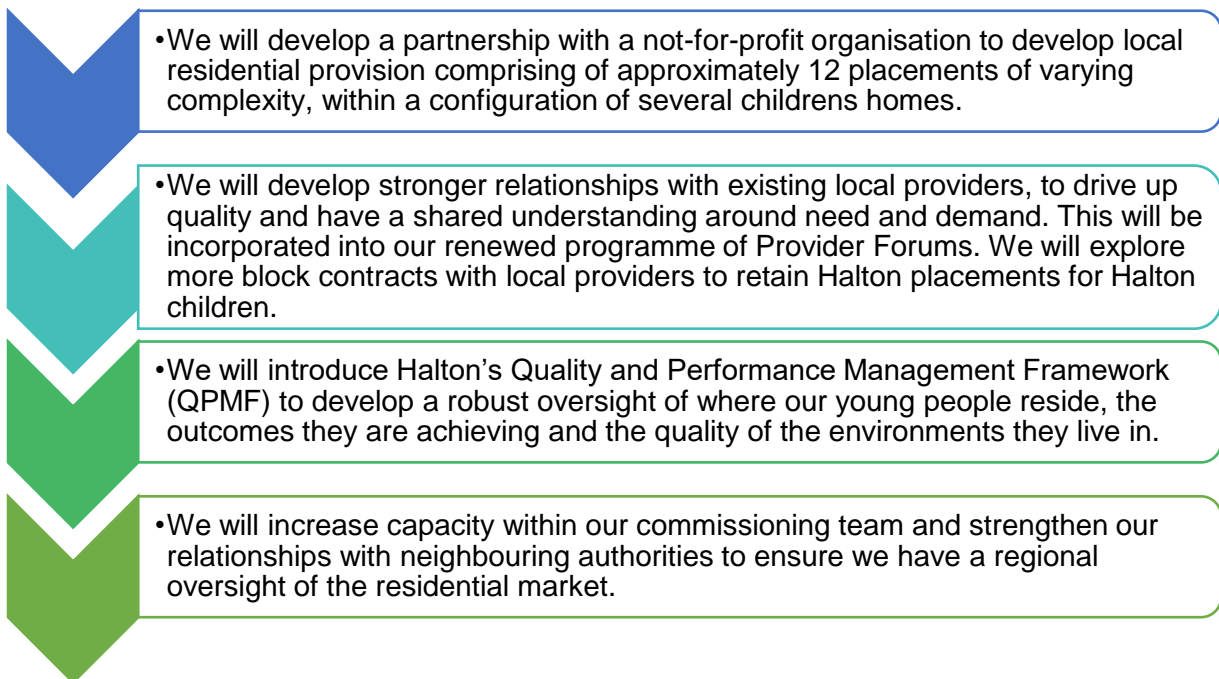
Halton continues to have the second highest concentration of 1 bed homes in the region. The current OFSTED rating for the Halton-based residential providers are:



Commissioning and Placement Team

We have an experienced Placements Team who know the local and regional landscape well, have good relationships with providers and are dedicated to the best possible outcomes for children and young people.

7.3 Next Steps



8. Supported Accommodation and Care Leavers

8.1 The Importance of Support and Stability for Care Leavers

Leaving home to live independently for young people in the general population is a challenging and anxiety provoking experience. They will be faced with new challenges and problems, but in most cases will have the support of their parents and extended family and others in their community networks. At the same time, most are not forced to leave at 18 years of age. Indeed, the average age for young people leaving home now is 26.

Leaving home/care for a looked after child is an even more challenging experience. Legally, children in care cease to be looked after at 18 years of age, but few of them are ready to be fully independent. We want to be able to provide our young people leaving care with support and guidance as close to that which their non-looked after peers get when they leave home as we can.

For that reason, we want to provide as much family like care leaver accommodation, such as ‘Staying Put’ foster care and to grow our Supported Lodgings offer, through review of our relevant policy and commissioning arrangements. These arrangements most closely resemble the environments that young people outside of care live in with their families and they are the most beneficial for supporting young people and providing continuing stability.

Where ‘Staying Put’ or Supported Lodging arrangements are not available or appropriate, we want to provide a range of Supported Accommodation provision to meet the diverse needs of the care leaver population, including those with some level of complex needs or learning difficulty.

We have an established and effective care leavers accommodation group. This meets on a monthly basis with members from housing providers and social and private landlords to ensure that all young people aged 17 and onwards are supported to find suitable accommodation.

8.2 What is Working Well?

Current Provision

Within the Halton borough, there are a range of internal Supported Accommodation options currently available from the authority, including:

- HBC Supported Lodgings Service - This small service is a sub-service of the Fostering Team and was established in early 2021, consisting of Host families in the community who are recruited, assessed and supported in much the same way as Foster Carers. To date, the Service has approved seven Host Households. This is semi-independent provision designed to bridge the gap between care and independence. The Service has supported a total of 9 young people.
- Commissioned Supported Accommodation Service – Halton currently commission a provider to operate a small group living provision, in addition to two trainer flats, which offer a step down to further independence option.
- YMCA - Self-contained flats for those aged 16-59 years, catering to those who are, predominantly, homeless. In total there are 66 beds of which 4 are direct access, subdivided into 3 units, inclusive of one designated for hospital discharge and two allocated for complex needs.
- Registered Social Landlords - Halton Borough Council can act as the tenant and floating support is delivered into the properties at a varied level to meet specific young people's needs
- We have made good progress on developing our Care Leavers Offer, however, we recognise that we need to grow our use of staying put, staying close and supported lodgings accommodation, and we are planning to expand these offers within this strategy.
- There are also a range of externally-commissioned, regulated provisions available for Halton Care Leavers in the borough, generally commissioned by the Local Authority, through private providers who are on the regional approval Supported Accommodation framework operated by Placements North West and Bolton Council.
- Within the North West region there is now in excess of 100 companies offering Supported Accommodation placements, this represents a significant increase within the last 7 years.

8.3 Next Steps

To achieve the ambitious plans around supporting our 16+ Children in Care and Care Leavers to access appropriate accommodation to meet their needs, there are a number of steps we will take. These will include:

- We will develop and expand the currently commissioned Supported Accommodation contract to include an increase in available trainer flats, alongside the existing group living accommodation.
- We will develop a portfolio of independence-focused self-contained accommodation, which will allow for equity across the borough and provide choice for children in care and care-leavers within quality Supported Accommodation.
- We will develop a "Care Leavers Hub" in the local area with dedicated spaces for Care Leavers to engage in and with additional services to support them in achieving full independence.
- We will develop a policy briefing on Staying Put Arrangements and ensure that the provision of accommodation for Care Leavers is planned in advance via robust Pathway Plans and that young people leaving care know their entitlements to support and guidance and receive them.
- We will improve transition arrangements for young people with disability and complex needs, by working closer with Adult Social Care Services in a timely manner, to generate through put of services.

9. Commissioning and Partnership Working

9.1 The Important Role of Joint Commissioning and Partnerships

It is a reality that we will continue to use a mixed market approach to the provision of placements for children in care and care leavers. In light of this, it is important that operational managers and commissioners work together to shape the care market provision so that it best meets our needs for local, high-quality, cost-effective placement accommodation.



It is essential that we work with partners in health, education, police, and housing services to plan and deliver sufficient accommodation. For example, we will need support from our health and education colleagues in planning our placement accommodation, when matching particular children to specific placements, and in supporting us to maintain the stability of placements. We will want to work co-operatively with the Police to manage and support young people at risk of offending.

9.2 What is working well??

- We are part of the regional North West Framework for Independent Fostering, Residential and Supported Accommodation provision.
- We currently lead on the Provider Partnership Agreement for the region.
- The average weekly fee that we pay for independent fostering agency placements and independent residential placements is less than the average for the region as a whole.

Alongside Practice

- Engage with parents to empower them to be change makers.
- Ensure practice is systemically trauma informed and develop robust contextual safeguarding knowledge across the system.
- Support in the development of the Neglect Strategy to improve inequality in the system.
- Support the development of the Family First Model integrated prevention strategy within the Early Help.

The commissioning activity must reflect the cross cutting activity across children's services, understanding that activity is co-dependent on success elsewhere in the system.

10. Measuring Success

10.1 How will we know we have been effective?

The provision of sufficient placement accommodation for children in care and care leavers is essential for improving their outcomes. Children in Care should be able to expect us to provide the right placement, at the right time, and in the right place.

It is therefore essential that we make progress in delivering the next step actions in this strategy.

We will measure our success based on the extent to which the following goals are achieved:

- The number of admissions into care will reduce
- The children in care and care leaver population will reduce
- The number of children and young people placed outside of Halton will reduce
- The number of children in residential care and supported accommodation will reduce
- The number of children Adopted or subject to Special Guardianship will increase.
- The number of Staying Put and Staying Close arrangements will increase.
- The number of children placed with in-house foster carers will increase.
- The number of children who are discharged from Care will increase.
- The councils expenditure on independent placements will decrease

Progress on those measures and others will be monitored and reported via the Childrens Sufficiency Board, and activity will be tracked through the Children and Families Joint Commissioning Partnership