

CHILDREN YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Children Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board on Monday, 11 November 2024 in the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillors C. Plumpton Walsh, McDermott and Skinner

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: A. Jones, B. Holmes, K. Appleton, C. Finch, D. Roberts and J. Dunning

Also in attendance: S. Walker – Department for Education and Councillor T. McInerney (in accordance with Standing Order No. 33)

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

	<i>Action</i>
CYP18 MINUTES	
The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2024 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.	
CYP19 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME	
It was confirmed that no public questions had been received.	
CYP20 QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT 1ST APRIL 2024 - 30TH JUNE 2024 .	
The Board considered a report from the Executive Director, Children's Services, which informed Members of the key performance indicators identified to measure progress against each of the priorities identified within the Children and Young People Plan.	
The format of the Quarterly Monitoring Report (QMR) had changed from previous reporting, in order to comply with the new corporate reporting template. The performance measures of the QMR had also changed, to correlate with	

the priorities identified in the newly launched Children and Young People Plan.

It was noted that the quarter 1 QMR was presented to the Board at the September meeting in the old format with the old measures. The new formatted report included the quarter 1 data, but reported on the new measures, so is able to demonstrate to Members the format and allow for comments so that any amendments could be made in preparation for future reporting.

The following performance indicators were questioned by Members:

P2.2 – this was found to be a typographical error as progress had increased from 12% to 17%;

P2 3-6 – the information was not provided as it related to quarter 2 data which was not ready. This would be presented going forward in this new template;

P3 – 6 & 7 – challenges continued with the new Speech and Language provider as they struggled to recruit staff and because of this, clients had to be prioritised according to need. This has since improved and they were now fully staffed so an improvement was expected. It was suggested that a report on the Speech and Language Service be included on the next PPB agenda;

P5 1-4 – there were unprecedented numbers of school suspensions and exclusions last year. This was a national issue and was thought to be related to social, mental and emotional health issues with some children, resulting from the Covid period. Officers were working with schools on this issue, although it was noted that any solutions would take time to get through the system and show improvements. There was no evidence that school exclusions were related to the aspirations of a schools exam results. If a pupil was presenting with behaviour problems all schools were encouraged to flag this up with the Local Authority. This would be reiterated at the upcoming Governors' conference;

P 6.5 – management of those children being home educated (Electively Home Educated) was explained to Members. There were two dedicated Home Education Officers employed by the Council, who monitored the quality of education being provided at home by carrying out reviews. The recent Ofsted inspection did highlight that Halton's EHE service was robust. A School Attendance Order was explained, which was used when Home Education Officers

considered the home provision to be inadequate. Debate around social interaction, support for EHE children, safeguarding, home visits and taking exams took place.

The Chair commented that some secondary school curriculums did not offer any creative GCSE's. This was noted and Officers advised that a curriculum review was being conducted by the new Government.

RESOLVED: That the quarterly monitoring report (QMR) is accepted as the mechanism by which Elected Members can monitor and scrutinise progress going forward.

Executive Director
of Children's
Services

CYP21 CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE HIGH COST PLACEMENTS

The Board received a report from the Executive Director, Children's Services, which provided an update on high cost placements within Children's Social Care.

Children's Social Care had seen an increase in the need to use residential provisions over a number of years due to a reducing number of foster carers and difficulties nationally to recruit foster families. This shortage of foster families has led to an increase in the use of residential placements and the age of children living in residential provisions has reduced.

The report provided details of the three highest cost placements and the circumstances surrounding these. It also outlined the efforts being made to engage with providers to establish provisions locally for children that meet their needs.

It was confirmed that the High Cost Place Panel was now in place and some results were being shown. In response to challenges from Members the following additional information was given:

- It was suggested that the High Cost Place Panel has central Government representation – this was currently not the case but the Director would look into the possibility of this;
- The imposing of rate/cost controls on providers – this had been looked into but no progress made so far, although it was still very much an ongoing conversation, so still on the agenda;
- It was recognised that a regional stance was needed in negotiating yearly uplifts from providers;
- The Council has appointed a commissioner

specifically for Children's Social Care placements and to date, this had seen some costs reduce and significant savings had been made; and

- It was suggested that a scrutiny topic group be established to look into this issue further.

The challenges faced by Children's Services was recognised by the Board as it was a high demand service competing in market with a low number of providers. To add to this, placement costs were continually rising year on year.

Officers would evidence the total amount of savings being made since the introduction of the Commissioner's role and present at a future meeting of the Board.

RESOLVED: That the report is noted.

Executive Director
of Children's
Services

CYP22 ANNUAL REPORT - COMMENTS, COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS RELATING TO CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 1ST APRIL 2023- 31ST MARCH 2024

The Board received the Annual Report – Comments, Complaints and Compliments, relating to Children's Social Care Services from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

The Annual Report, a statutory requirement, provided an analysis of complaints processed under the Children's Act 1989 Representation's Procedure and evidenced how feedback from service users had been used to improve delivery. A summary of complaints received during the 2023-24 period was provided on page 60 of the agenda.

The report also provided Members with an update and feedback on compliments made by clients and positive feedback from workers / professionals relating to Children's Services in the Directorate. The report demonstrated the positive impact and outcomes on the lives of people accessing services in this Directorate.

In response to a question regarding the turnover of social workers, this could be for many reasons such as promotions, some retiring and some leaving the profession, so there was always movement within this area. Halton was however, still committed to its Retention Strategy, as discussed in previous meetings.

RESOLVED: That the reports presented are accepted as the mechanism by which Elected Members can monitor and scrutinise Children's Social Care complaints and compliments.

CYP23 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE

The Board considered a report from the Executive Director, Children's Services, which provided an update on the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Improvement Plan, in particular the progress made against the targets set out in the Delivering Better Values (DBV) Grant.

DBV is a Department for Education (DfE) Programme working to identify and implement local opportunities to improve the outcomes for children and young people with SEND across 54 local authorities and aid local systems in their objective of achieving financial sustainability. Halton was identified as being eligible to apply for DBV grant funding and was awarded £1m, to primarily build resilience across all educational systems to support and include learners with social, emotional, and mental health needs. This additional funding presented a significant opportunity to positively transform inclusive practices across Halton.

The report described in detail the various projects and initiatives being delivered in Halton's schools under the DBV and the costs associated with these to date.

It was reported that Halton was taking a different approach to other local authorities in that it was using an innovative approach and targeting the funding into the schools themselves. This was being closely monitored by the Department for Education who were happy with this. All school settings were included in the Programme and positive responses had been received, after receiving feedback from many headteachers.

Further to questions, it was commented that the impacts of the program would follow, but long term impacts were expected. The data collated was analysed by Halton analysts'. The *Team around the School* also worked with the Programme, which added prevention and inclusion measures. It was also commented that an exit strategy was included in the Programme, as this was a requirement of the grant.

RESOLVED: That the report and comments made be noted.

CYP24 HALTON'S VIRTUAL SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

The Board received the Headteacher of the Virtual

School's Annual Report for 2023-24, on the educational outcomes and achievement for Halton's Children in Care, and the School's wider work across Children's Services.

The Annual Report provided Members with information on the work of the Virtual School throughout the academic year and presented detailed analysis of how Halton's Children in Care had performed against each of the individual key performance indicators. This included a summary of the Virtual School's progress towards its identified key priorities for the academic year 2023-24, and the priorities for the School in 2024-25.

The following additional information was provided in response to Members questions:

- Pupil Premium Plus and Wider Funding – Approximately £356,972 was spent directly on the children and young people to improve their educational outcomes. The remainder of the £695,750 grant was centrally retained and spent on the School itself, which provided Education Psychology time, speech and language support and the staff within the Virtual School;
- Practical interventions could be made for children in care in certain circumstances and the Council could direct a school to admit a child;
- There were independent services available for children who were victims of crime and violence, depending on age, such as *Barnardos*. The Emotional and Mental Health Panel would also intervene in these situations;
- 'Growth' was a Charity that helped with young people not in employment, education or training (NEETS) and worked alongside the Council; and
- The Education and Health Hub, part of the Reconnecting Runcorn project would be available to offer services to care leavers in the future: <https://reconnectingruncorn.info/education-and-health-hub/>

It was noted that at the most recent ILACS inspection, the Virtual School had received exemplary feedback from inspectors.

RESOLVED: That the Board:

- 1) notes the information provided; and
- 2) accepts the Headteacher of the Virtual School's

Annual Report as an accurate account of the performance on the education outcomes and achievement of Halton's Children in Care.

CYP25 CHANGES TO SCHOOL ATTENDANCE GUIDANCE

The Executive Director, Children's Services, presented a report outlining the recent changes in school attendance policies, following the release of the Department for Education's (DfE) *Working Together to Improve Schools Attendance* guidance, in August 2024.

The report highlighted the key changes in the following areas, as well as their implications and responsibilities of local authorities:

- Daily data sharing and monitoring;
- Enhanced multi agency collaboration;
- Increased fines and legal interventions;
- Support for pupils with mental health and SEND needs;
- Changes to attendance codes and registers; and
- The role of local authorities.

It was noted that the new measures were now operational across Halton's schools and all schools had fully complied. The new measures were designed to promote regular attendance, enhance monitoring and offer targeted support to pupils facing barriers.

Further to Members questions it was confirmed that there were 790 fines in total across Halton last year, 442 of those were in secondary schools. Members were reassured that the profits from fines were put back into the attendance support service for families. It was also confirmed that most fines came from term time holidays being taken. It was recognised that a significant amount of a child's schooling is lost when they are absent for 1-2 weeks each year.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CYP26 SCHOOL PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES 2024

The Board received a presentation on the validated school performance data which was published on 24 October 2024.

Performance outcomes for schools across Halton at the end of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Key Stages 2 and 5 were shared with the Board. It was reported

that the outcomes for Key Stage 4 had been delayed by the Department for Education (DfE) and were expected in December 2024.

The Board noted the following highlights:

- Good Level of Development – this was slightly down on last year to 61.2;
- Phonics – was consistently the same; and
- KS 2 – this had increased slightly to 59.6 (reading, writing and maths combined).

Members were advised that data relating to individual schools in their Wards could be found using the link in paragraph 3.4 of the report.

RESOLVED: That the outcomes presented be noted.

Meeting ended at 8.40 p.m.