

REPORT TO: Children, Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 13th June 2022

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, People

PORTFOLIO: Children & Young People

SUBJECT: Halton Local Area SEND Strategy 2021-25

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To advise the board on the progress and updates in relation to the local area SEND Strategy and current pressures.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION: That:**

- i) **Members are asked to consider the presentation and raise any questions they may have on SEND provision and support, the local area strategy and its implementation.**

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 **EHCP POSITION**

3.1.1 The number of applications for EHC needs assessments has continued on the high rate seen since covid restrictions were eased in schools over summer 2021. To the end of April Halton has received 241 applications for assessment. This remains on course to be the highest level of applications received over an academic year and is (with three months to go) already the second highest year. Of the 240 applications received, the Partnership Panel agreed to assess for 208 indicating that in the main the thresholds for application is well understood in the system.

3.1.2 The rise in parental applications over the year is becoming cause for concern. Parental applications now account for almost 20% of applications. Applications from parents are often missing information or not backed up by schools resulting in delays in the application process.

3.1.3 Halton SENAT have issued 75 EHCPs in the first four months of 2022. Until the end of March the completion rate within 20 weeks had remained at 75.6% broadly in line with 2021 rates. However this

has declined in April and the year to date completion rate stands at 62.5%.

- 3.1.4 The decline in completion rates is due to three factors. The first is the increase in EHC needs assessments coming through the system placing an increased caseload for each assessment co-ordinator. Caseloads currently sit at an average of 170 per co-ordinator up from 100 four years ago.
- 3.1.5 The second factor has been an ongoing lack of capacity within the admin hub. The admin hub is responsible for monitoring the SENAT inbox, maintaining and moving workflows forward on the system, receiving and logging new applications and annual reviews on synergy and sending out requests for professional advice. Lack of capacity and delays in a number of these areas have led to cases going over timescales.
- 3.1.6 The final factor that is impacting the timeliness of plan delivery is the increasing complexity of cases and the ongoing challenge to find appropriate provision for a number of children and young people. In addition to the current sufficiency challenges faced by the local area with respect to its in borough specialist provision, the availability of more regional independent school places is under increasing pressure creating delays in finalising plans as provision placements are sought.
- 3.1.7 Quality monitoring and assurance continues to be a priority despite the pressure faced by the team. The assistant DCO for Halton is now co-located part time with the assessment team to support better quality and partnership working with respect to the health elements of EHCPs. Earlier this term an exploratory meeting was held with Invision360 to review their online moderation and QA tool. This allows for the tracking of plan quality and benchmarking against the other 50 plus LAs who use the tool. QA scoring can be done across a range of partners and the analysis tools provided by the platform will allow the SENAT manager to see both which elements of the EHCP and which stakeholders have particular concerns. The platform will also provide quality performance dashboards that can provide assurance to the SEND Strategic partnership and evidence for local area inspections. Budget has been identified for the tool and it is hoped that procurement can take place before the end of the academic year. As the tool is used by a number of other LAs in the North West a subgroup of the NWADCS SEND Leads including Halton is looking at a program of regional plan moderations.
- 3.1.8 A new SEN Assessment Team manager will be starting with the LA on the 11th July. This will add much needed capacity both for the team and the Inclusion Division more broadly while being able to accelerate quality improvement for EHCPs to support better outcomes for children. Progress has also been made in Halton

SEND parent carer forum (HSPCF) representation at Partnership Panel and the necessary training and memorandums of understanding regarding confidentiality are being developed based on best practice models from other local areas.

3.2 STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENTS

- 3.2.1 The Working Better Together sub-group of the SEND Partnership have been focussed in the early stages of their work in the review and implementation of a joint equipment policy to support schools and settings in accessing equipment for children and young people with SEND. This will have an impact in reducing waiting times to access equipment, improve storage and sharing of equipment and put in place clear processes and expectations for schools and practitioners.
- 3.2.2 Great strides have also been made in the development of a Halton Co-production Charter. The Charter will set out the expectations and ambitions for organisations and families as we work together to improve outcomes for Halton's children and young people with SEND. Co-production at both a strategic, service design, level and individually with families is at the heart of the local areas ambitions and part of our statutory duties and the charter will support the workforce development required to deliver this. A draft co-production charter is due to be completed by the 6th July and in place for the next academic year.
- 3.2.3 Halton have been identified as a region to be part of the DFE "Delivering Better Values" programme. The programme is designed to ensure that Halton can improve services and outcomes for children and young people with additional needs within the available high needs funding allocation. Further details will be released by the DFE shortly but Halton's involvement will bring investment and scrutiny focused on timeliness and ensuring CYP and families receive the right support at the right time in the right way.
- 3.2.4 A new SEND Sufficiency Strategy is being developed for publication before the Summer. The high levels of demand in the borough has led to a range of capacity constraints in local school. The Sufficiency Strategy will set out how the local authority will work with schools and other education providers to meet the needs of local children. The sufficiency work will be supported by the SEN Capital Grant announced at the end of March. The grant provides for £3.3m in capital funding to support the development of provision.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None identified.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None identified.

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

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

The purpose of the 2021-2025 Halton SEND Strategy is to improve outcomes for, and the lived experience of, children and young people with SEND and their families. Currently children recognised as having a special educational needs and/or disability make up over 17% of the areas school age population therefore the strategy will make a significant contribution towards ensuring that Halton's children and young people have the best possible start in life.

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

Young people with SEND and Learning difficulties are disproportionately likely to be NEET or unemployed. Elements of the strategy are aimed at improving employability and skills for these young people leading to meaningful employment.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Children and young people with SEND are disproportionately likely to be overweight, lack opportunities to access healthy lifestyles and leisure activities and die young. Improving health outcomes for these children and young people is a core objective of SEND Strategic Priority 3: Preparation for Adulthood.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

None identified.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None identified.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 Without a coherent and joined up strategic approach to meeting the needs and improving the life outcomes and lived experience of children and young people and their families it will be considerably more challenging for the local area to meet its statutory and morale duties.

7.2 Individual objectives within the strategy will in some cases contain projects that may require separate risk analysis. Where this is the case these will be overseen by the SEND Strategic Partnership.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 Individual objectives within the strategy will in some cases contain projects that require separate and individual equality impact analysis and assessment as part of good practice. Where this is the case these will be overseen by the SEND Strategic Partnership.

9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

9.1 None under the meaning of the Act.