

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

DATE: 12th June 2023

REPORTING OFFICER: Operational Director, Children's Social Care
and Early Help

PORTFOLIO: Children and Young People

SUBJECT: Children's Social Care Update

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 Members of the Board to receive a presentation detailing the work undertaken to date in relation to the Children's Services Improvement Plan.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Members of the Board:

- i) Note the current position on progress in relation to the requirements as set out by the Department for Education in the Notice of Improvement issued to the Council;
- ii) Moving forward the key priorities and actions outlined in the Children's Improvement Plan.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Children's Services continues to operate under the auspices of an Notice of Improvement issued by the Department for Education in January 2022. This followed the Ofsted Focused Visit completed in October 2021. As such, the Council as required under the conditions of the Notice of Improvement to have an Improvement Plan, whilst also operating with a Children's Improvement Board.

3.2 The Improvement Plan is currently being reviewed to ensure that it is aligned with the findings from the most recent Ofsted Focused Visit completed in November 2022, along with the Department for Education 12 month review of the Improvement Notice that was reported to the Council in March 2023. The findings from the latest Ofsted Focused Visit were reported to Members of this Board in January 2023, therefore this information will not be repeated in this report.

3.3 The Department for Education reported the outcome of the 12 month review of the Children's Service Improvement Plan on 14 March 2023. The main highlights in the report included:

- The Council had made stronger progress since June 2022 towards improving the quality of social work practice;
- The improvements and transformations required in Children's Services is better understood and it has been prioritised within the Council;
- Morale had improved across the social care workforce and there was a sense of improved optimism about the way forward;
- Staff commented about the increased visibility of senior leaders, but there was work still to do to support engagement and communication with the workforce;
- Workforce continues to be an issue. Whilst there is a level of stability amongst the workforce, it remain too heavily reliant upon agency social workers, whilst challenges remain in supporting permanent social work recruitment;
- Progress has been slow in the development of partnership working across agencies in the borough. This was primarily linked to personnel changes amongst key officers across the agencies, in addition to the arrangements for the Safeguarding Partnership not proving effective.

3.4 Several priorities for the Council have been set by the Department for Education, and these are detailed below:

- **Workforce capacity and stability** – Strengthen the recruitment processes in Halton and ensure there is corporate support to increase the number of new permanent social workers in Halton.
- **Partnership working** – Develop the safeguarding partnership in line with the Adviser's recommendations. In particular, strengthen the strategic local safeguarding children's partnership arrangements, including developing the partnership response to child exploitation and the relationship with schools.
- **Practice model and social work practice** – With support from Warrington, implement your plan for systemic social work practice in Halton and ensure this is embedded throughout all areas of the service and with partners. Ensure there is a relentless focus on improving practice and developing the Council's approach to audit to inform practice improvements.
- **Communication and engagement** – Review Halton's internal and external communication and engagement to ensure that staff and partners are well informed and are on the journey with the Council. This is particularly important to the success of implementing the systemic practice model.

3.5 The Children's Services Improvement Plan is being refreshed to

ensure it covers the latest findings and priorities as set out in the Department for Education review. The refreshed Children's Improvement plan and road map will be brought to the next PPB for challenge and scrutiny

- 3.6 It's recognised that there is still much work to be completed to ensure the Council is confident that it has met the requirements of the Improvement Notice, and the findings from Ofsted inspection reports.

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**

Having a strong and robust framework for identifying and responding across all agencies is the key to ensuring that children and young people are safe and protected, and partners are clear about their responsibilities and role in working together.

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

None identified.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Children and young people whose health needs and level of development is potentially compromised are identified early and multi-agency support is in place to support them.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

Children who are at risk of harm are identified quickly and services work together to minimise the risk of harm and take action to formally protect children in a timely way.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None identified.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

- 7.1 All key stakeholders are committed to working together to ensure a

robust and consistent approach to protect children in Halton.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 Issues arising from a child's equality and diversity needs will inform the decision-making at the point of contact and it will be ensured that the voice of the child is to the forefront.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None identified.

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

10.1 None.