

## 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, 9 September 2024 in the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn*

Present: Councillors Logan (Chair), C. Plumpton Walsh (Vice-Chair), Baker, Begg, Goodall, Jones, P. Lloyd Jones, McDermott and Ryan

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Ratcliffe and Skinner

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: A. Jones, B. Holmes and K. Appleton

Also in attendance: Councillor T. McInerney, in accordance with Standing Order number 33

### ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

*Action*

#### CYP10 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2024 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

#### CYP11 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

It was confirmed that no public questions had been received.

#### CYP12 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES

The minutes relating to the Children, Young People and Families Portfolio, taken from the Executive Board meetings held since the last meeting of this Board, were attached at Appendix one for information.

#### CYP13 ANNUAL REPORT - 2023-24

The Chair presented the Children, Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board's Annual Report for 2023-24. The Board met four times during the year and the report set out the work carried out during the Municipal Year April 2023 to March 2024.

RESOLVED: That the 2023-24 Annual Report be received and noted.

#### CYP14 CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE UPDATE

The Board received a presentation on the progress made in the areas identified by OFSTED as areas for improvement, including workforce stability.

The Board was advised of the Council's strengths and responses to these, and the key findings and action taken to date.

Members scrutinised the responses given and offered challenge on areas where progress measures and financial implications were identified and the following information was provided:

- Previously, embedding a systemic model of social work practice had been hindered by previous staff instability and high rates of agency staff. Some staff who had been trained on systemic models had moved on to other local authorities. Halton would have this practice in place in the future;
- Agency staff numbers were at 41% so were slowly reducing. Recruitment challenges were still being faced with competition from neighbouring authorities;
- Despite the number of agency workers, a reduction in costs was being made due to having a fixed pay rate, which was not the case previously;
- Following challenge, assurance was given and an explanation provided on the processes and procedures in place for supervision of children placed out of Borough, including the Post 16 cohort and care leavers;
- Detail and explanation was provided on the creation of a new 'Edge of Care' Service, and the rationale behind this decision. This included benefits to families and children, as well as cost saving through prevention of children coming into care;
- Following the establishment of an additional post, the new Principal Social Worker would be starting in September. They would support practice improvements further. This role brought with it the opportunity to be part of the social workers network which Halton has not had before;
- Some specific social worker posts in Halton were fixed term contracts; and
- The new *Connect2Halton* recruitment service would be used going forward to recruit temporary staff when

required. In the long term, this would reduce costs for the Council.

Officers provided updates and statistical information on the use of the Family Hubs in Halton since they opened. A further update would be provided at a future meeting of the Board.

RESOLVED: That the presentation is noted.

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#### CYP15 SEND IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND PARENT SURVEY

The Board received a presentation on the progress made against the SEND Improvement Plan and the findings of a recent parent survey.

The Delivering Better Values (DBV) Programme was outlined, which aimed to support local authorities and their partners in improving the delivery of SEND (Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities) services for children and young people. The DVB Programme focussed on financial sustainability whilst ensuring good outcomes for children with SEND.

Workstreams one and two were explained, which included work around *Thrive* and *Team Teach* training, and the plans for *Emotional Based School Non-Attendance* training.

The outcomes of the Children and Young People and Parent/Carer Surveys were presented. These had identified 5 priorities, below, details of which were given in the report:

1. Strategic Oversight and Governance;
2. Cohesive communication / joined up systems;
3. Joint Commissioning;
4. Early identification of need and access; and
5. Education Health and Care Plans.

Overall the parents / carers expressed dissatisfaction with the process and communication from both Education and Health professionals, although there was greater satisfaction with social care services. Further details of these areas of dissatisfaction were presented.

The following responses were provided to Members' questions:

- Although 73% of schools had signed up to *Thrive*, 27% had not. The main reasons were because they

had already done something similar at their schools or, there were capacity issues. So they either plan to access the training in the future, or already had equivalent training embedded;

- Discussions regarding the business models of Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) in relation to excluding pupils with SEND – officers had met with CEO's of 90% of all MATs in Halton to discuss working together to improve school attendance, including the impact of suspensions. Meetings would be held with the dioceses' as well in the coming months to discuss the same;
- Data was being collected regarding exclusions of children with SEND, which would be presented when available;
- Two senior quality assurance officers had been recruited to work with schools around the Local Authority's statutory duties, including attendance, inclusion and alternative provision;
- Academy schools were required to engage with local authorities on statutory matters/duties;
- A list of schools with resource bases within them would be provided to the Board for information;
- Raise Academy was now open and Members were invited to contact the Head Teacher if they wished to visit. An open day was being arranged for the Schools' neighbours; and
- The Board requested further information and reporting on the number of children for whom there was an open search for an independent special school, due to no suitable provision in Borough being identified. The Board noted the financial implications, including transport costs associated with this placement, as well as the impact upon the child in accessing education outside of the Borough.

It was noted that the complete survey's Q and A would be sent to the Board for information.

RESOLVED: That the Plan and comments made be noted.

## CYP16 SUPPORTING FAMILIES UPDATE

The Board considered a report from the Executive Director of Children's Services, which provided an update of the Supporting Families Programme.

It was noted that the Programme had been transferred to the Department of Education (DfE) from the

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Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in April 2024. This would enable the Education Secretary to deliver a coordinated, whole system of support for children and families, as well as ensuring services were sustainable for local government.

The report described the revised Supporting Families Outcomes Framework and the ten headline outcomes set out within this. Below these outcomes sat descriptors of family needs that made up the eligibility criteria for the Supporting Families Programme, as well as suggested data sources for identifying families with these needs.

The report outlined details of the refreshed Early Help System guide published in March 2024 and Halton's position within this. This included feedback on the progress of 2022 priorities which helped confirm Halton's 2023 priorities; these were presented in the report.

Further, information on performance, funding and commissioned services was provided, as well as a case study example, showing how one family had engaged positively with the Programme.

Members noted that the Programme was 100% grant funded and there was no expectation that this would continue beyond March 2025. In response to questions, it was confirmed that there would be no direct impact on children 'on the edge of care' once it was ended.

It was commented that as the Programme offered key services, cessation of these would impact on other services, so much so, that the Local Authority may have to fund them. Officers would return to the Board with further details on the financial implications of this and more details around how this would affect supporting families.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CYP17 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT FOR QUARTER 1 2024/25

The Board received the Performance Management reports for quarter 1 of 2024-25 (1 April 2024 to 30 June 2024).

The key priorities for development or improvement in 2024-25 were agreed by Members and included in the Local Authority's Business Plan for the various function areas reporting to the Board as follows:

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- Education, Inclusion and Provision Services; and
- Children and Families Services.

The reports detailed progress made against objectives, milestones and performance targets and provided information relating to key developments and emerging issues that had arisen during the period. Members were requested to consider the progress and performance information and highlight any areas of interest and/or concern, where further information could be reported at a future meeting of the Board.

Members requested that the financial implications for services in both areas be considered and included in future reports. Examples given were providing the details of the three most expensive packages of children in care and school placements (anonymised). Details such as these would help to give a better understanding of the impact on budgets.

In response to questions relating to unaccompanied asylum seeking children and the expectation that requests for accommodation would be made from Government in the coming weeks, it was reported that so far this had not happened. It was confirmed that two of these children were in care at the moment, one in foster care and one in residential care.

One Member suggested, following her conversations with constituents from the Syrian community, that they be approached to assist with fostering children from the same country, as they seemed open to this. This would be passed onto the Fostering Board to consider.

**RESOLVED:** That the Performance Management reports for quarter 1 of 2024-25 be received.

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*Meeting ended at 8.35 p.m.*