

REPORT TO: Health & Wellbeing Board

DATE: 14th January 2026

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director of Children's Services

PORTFOLIO: Children and Young People

SUBJECT: Father Inclusive Practice in Halton

WARD(S): All

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Health and Wellbeing Board with an overview of the work being undertaken in Halton to embed father-inclusive practice across the partnership. It aims to outline the rationale, progress to date, emerging impacts, and next steps, ensuring alignment with local priorities and the Best Start in Life strategy.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That the Board:

- 1) Note the report;
- 2) Endorse the continued development of father-inclusive practice in Halton;
- 3) Support the integration of father-inclusive principles into all relevant strategies and commissioning plans; and
- 4) Encourage partner agencies to adopt and embed father-inclusive approaches

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Fathers play a vital role in children's emotional stability, social skills, and academic success. Research shows that when fathers are actively involved, outcomes for children improve significantly (better mental health, educational attainment, and resilience). Father-inclusive practice challenges stereotypes, promotes equality, and ensures services reflect the needs of all caregivers. In Halton, this approach is critical for addressing diverse family needs and improving community wellbeing.

3.2 **Around 1 in 10 fathers experience depression and up to 18% report anxiety or stress during the perinatal period.**

3.3 Fathers often face barriers to engagement, including:
Masculinity norms and reluctance to seek help.
Inflexible service hours and lack of male practitioners.

- 3.4 Digital interventions show promise for engaging fathers, as many rely on online resources for parenting support.
- 3.5 **Fatherhood Champions:** 18 trained champions across services to lead and cascade father-inclusive practice.
- 3.6 **Staff Training:** Delivered sessions on safeguarding, perinatal engagement, and communication strategies; hosted a Father Inclusive Conference with 90 professionals
- 3.7 **Service Design:** Co-produced research with fathers; developed tailored programmes (e.g., male-only stay-and-play, weekend sessions).
- 3.8 **Digital Support:** Commissioned AI-driven tools and apps (e.g., DadPad) to provide timely, relevant parenting information.
- 3.9 **Policy & Advocacy:** Adopted the “Dads Included” self-assessment tool to embed father-inclusive principles across agencies.
- 3.10 **Professional Confidence:** 97.7% of professionals reported improved understanding of father-inclusive practice after the conference.
- 3.11 **Fathers’ Feedback:** Fathers expressed that inclusive services and informal support opportunities improved their confidence and mental wellbeing.
- 3.12 **Commitment:** 100% of professionals indicated they were likely to advocate for and implement father-inclusive strategies.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme highlights the need for universal parenting support, early mental health intervention, and whole-family engagement—including fathers—in services for children 0–5.
- 4.2 The Families First Partnership (FFP) programme underscores a holistic, multi-agency early-help vision for families, demanding assessment of all caregivers, including fathers
- 4.3 The NHS Long Term Plan commits to recognizing and supporting paternal mental health, ensuring partners—including fathers—are offered screening and support if maternal perinatal mental health issues emerge
- 4.4 First-ever national Men’s Health Strategy was published on 19

November 2025, providing a 10-year vision for improving the physical and mental health of men and boys in England

4.5 The strategy explicitly recognises that men are less likely to seek help and suffer stigma tied to masculinity norms—challenges also faced by fathers during the perinatal and early childhood period.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Investment from the first wave of family hub transformation funding has been aligned to this priority and strategy up to this point

5.2 Halton has received an additional 3 year financial settlement to further continue and embed in line with the Best Start in Life Strategy.

5.3 Children’s Social Care have invested in training and development opportunities to increase the number of fatherhood champions across Halton

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

6.1 **Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**
Halton’s father-inclusive work directly supports the council priority of “Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence” by addressing health inequalities and strengthening family resilience. It improves health through early mental health support for fathers, promotes wellbeing by fostering stronger family relationships and reducing isolation, and supports independence by empowering fathers with skills and confidence to actively contribute to their children’s lives. These actions reduce reliance on crisis services and create sustainable, community-based support networks.

6.2 **Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy**
Father-inclusive practice contributes to building a strong, sustainable, and local economy by supporting parents—particularly fathers—to stay engaged in family life while maintaining employment. Flexible service hours, digital support, and mental health interventions reduce stress and absenteeism, helping fathers remain productive in the workforce. Strong family relationships improve resilience, reducing demand on crisis services and enabling parents to contribute economically. Additionally, by promoting equality and shared parenting, this work supports workforce participation for both parents, which is vital for local economic growth and sustainability.

6.3 **Supporting Children, Young People and Families**
This work directly supports the priority of “Supporting Children, Young People and Families” by promoting whole-family engagement. Father-inclusive practice improves outcomes for children, strengthens family resilience, and ensures services are accessible and inclusive for all caregivers. By embedding these principles, Halton is delivering early help that prevents escalation, supports mental health, and creates a foundation for lifelong wellbeing.

6.4 **Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need**
Father-inclusive practice helps tackle inequality and support those most in need by addressing systemic barriers that often exclude fathers from services. Many fathers—especially in disadvantaged communities—face challenges such as inflexible service hours, stigma around help-seeking, and lack of targeted support. By embedding inclusive approaches, Halton ensures fathers have equal access to early help, mental health support, and parenting resources. This reduces health inequalities, improves outcomes for children, and strengthens family resilience, particularly for those at greatest risk of social and economic disadvantage.

6.5 **Working Towards a Greener Future**
None identified.

6.6 **Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**
None identified.

6.7 **Resilient and Reliable Organisation**
None identified.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 If funding declines, initiatives like Fatherhood Champions and tailored commissioned services may not be maintained.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 Failure to embed inclusive practice could perpetuate gender inequality and disadvantage families most in need so its important we ensure all services adopt father-inclusive language, environments, and policies.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 Please describe any environmental and climate implications that will be generated by the recommendations or advice you are intending to present through this report. How does the recommendations of this report support the Council’s response to the environment and climate emergency e.g. by promoting energy efficiency;

limiting/eliminating fossil fuel use for heat, power and transport; limiting/eliminating waste and encouraging re-use of resources and encouraging procurement of local suppliers.

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

None under the meaning of the Act.