



**Halton Strategy for
Children in Care
and Care Leavers
2023-26**

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| INTRODUCTION..... | 3 |
| VISION..... | 4 |
| WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT CHILDREN LIVING IN HALTON | 5 |
| WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE CHILDREN IN CARE | 7 |
| LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND NATIONAL GUIDANCE INFORMING THIS STRATEGY | 10 |
| FOUNDATIONS OF GOOD CORPORATE PARENTING..... | 11 |
| HOW WE WILL WORK | 12 |
| CHILDREN’S VOICES | 13 |
| WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE TELL US ABOUT CARE IN HALTON? | 14 |
| OBJECTIVES FOR ACHIEVING THIS STRATEGY | 16 |
| MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK..... | 18 |
| REPORTING THAT SUPPORTS THE STRATEGY | 19 |

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Halton's Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2023 – 2026. This multi-agency strategy has been developed to ensure we, in our role as corporate parents, deliver the best possible outcomes for children and young people in our care.

Whatever the cause for our children and young people needing us to be their corporate parents, we are committed to providing safe and caring homes and accommodation for our young people where they can recover, and then be helped to have dreams and aspirations.

Our corporate parenting responsibility should not end when a young person leaves care. As partner agencies, we recognise the best outcomes for children in care and care leavers can only be achieved through effective partnership working. We will listen to our children and young people, we will hear what they tell us about their care, and we will challenge ourselves and the services that support them.

This multi-agency strategy continues the work of the previous one and recognises that every Corporate Parent has a part to play in improving outcomes. It establishes shared priorities and the actions to be taken over the next 3 years to make a positive difference to lives and outcomes.

This strategy is the framework by which agencies and services in Halton will ensure that children in care and care leavers have the same opportunities as their peers and are able to reach their full potential.

Councillor Tom McInerney
Chair of the Children in Care and Care Leavers Partnership Board

VISION

Children deserve the best start in life, to be loved and nurtured and for the great majority of children they will experience this living with their birth family until they are old enough to be independent.

As corporate parents for those children who come into our care, we need to be able to name the things we do that improves and enhances their lives and makes them feel safe, loved and cared for. We want to listen to children and young people in care, and they should be able to tell us what we are doing right and what we need to do better. We will share their aspirations and celebrate their successes. No one should feel left out, and everyone will feel that they are important to us as their corporate parent.

The Halton Children in Care and Care Leavers strategy 2023-26, outlines our key objectives for children in care and care leavers and sets out actions we intend to take to achieve them. It provides the framework for all Council officers, partners and elected members to fulfil their roles in ensuring that looked after children achieve their full potential.

This strategy outlines our priorities for supporting children in care and the way in which the council and partners will be held accountable. Delivery against our commitments will be monitored diligently by the Corporate Parenting Board. The board will listen to young people and check that they are happy and healthy, receiving a top-quality education and have access to training and employment opportunities, as well as their own home to go to when the time comes to live independently.

We will promote a child centred approach with a focus on improving the outcomes and experience of our children in care, leavers and those with care experience. Everyone who works with our children, young people and their families will be responsible for delivering the aims of this strategy.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT CHILDREN LIVING IN HALTON



27,536 Children aged 0-17 living in Halton (ONS 2021)

We provide a range of services to these children the majority of whom live with their families.

372 Children in Care (June 2023)



200 Males

172 Females

92% White British


Largest number of children is in the 10-15 years age range



139 care leavers open to service with personal advisor and **97** extended Care Leavers up to age 25.

98% of open care leavers are in suitable accommodation

58% are engaged in Education, Employment or Training (EET)

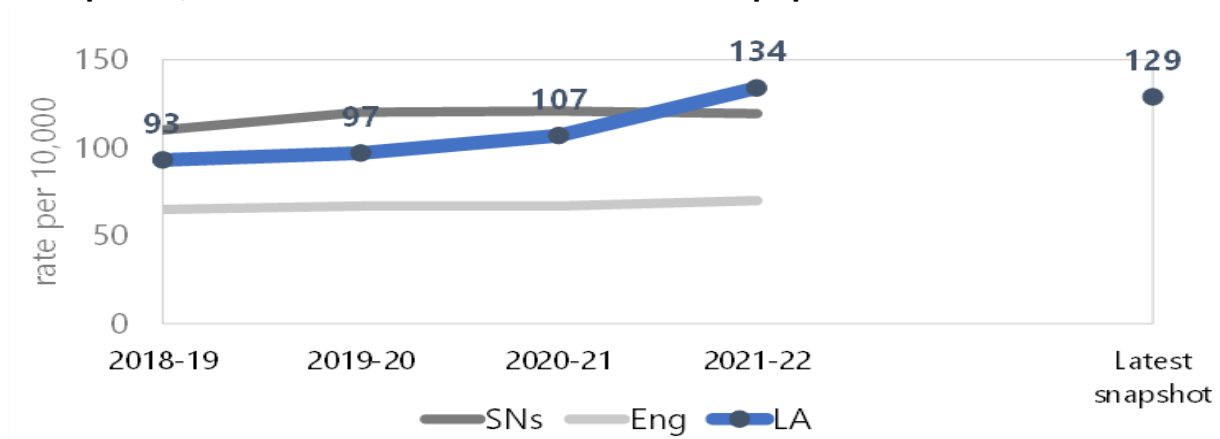
A vibrant, circular illustration of a park scene. The scene is viewed from a high angle, looking down into a circular frame. In the center, a large white circle contains the text "Friendship leaves a warm feeling inside of you". Surrounding this central circle is a colorful, detailed illustration of a park. On the left, a man and a woman sit on a wooden bench, talking. A woman in a pink shirt sits on a bench nearby. In the middle, a woman in a blue dress waters a flower bed. A child is playing on a red slide. On the right, a man and a woman walk together, and a woman in a wheelchair is positioned near a large rainbow. A child is playing on a yellow seesaw. In the background, there are green trees, a yellow sun, white clouds, and a colorful kite flying in the sky. The overall scene is bright and cheerful, representing a community of people enjoying a day in a park.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE CHILDREN IN CARE

We know that over the last two years the number of children in care has increased significantly. We want to reverse this by making sure that we have the right approach to family support and return home those children currently in care where this can safely happen.

The chart below shows the increase in the number per 10,000 of children in care June 2023 is higher compared to statutory neighbors and the national level. This gives a clear indication of the pressure on the system and the need to address the systemic issues leading to the overall increase in numbers.

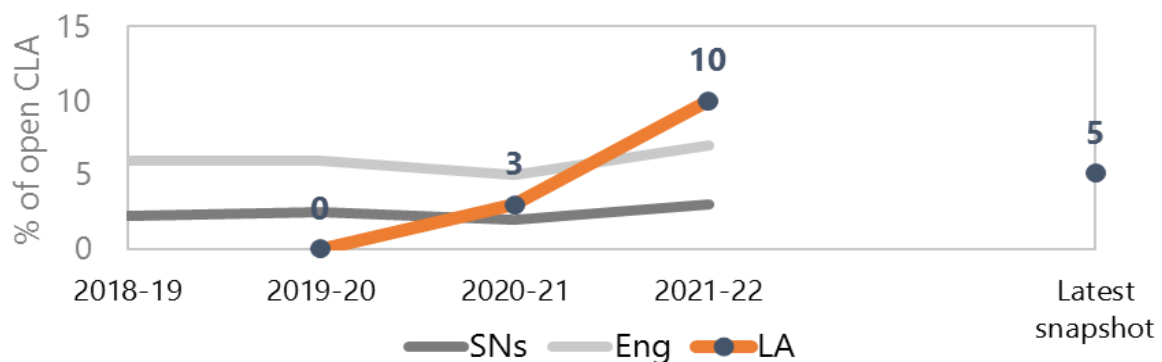
Rate per 10,000 looked after children in the child population of Halton



In the last six months to June 2023, 48 children came into care and 60 left care. The numbers have remained high but steady to Jun 2023. The main reason why young people left care was because they had special guardianship order. We have 46 children in care with a plan to return to family.

Number of Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

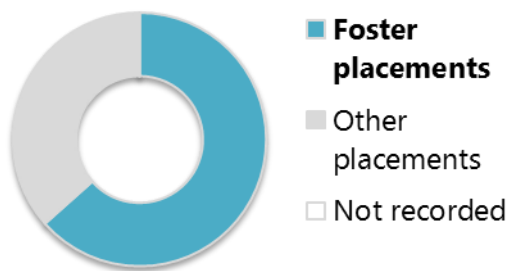
The chart below shows the increase has slowed as a percentage of the total children in care population of children coming in to care who are seeking asylum. This is because they have moved to Care Leavers Services due to their age.



Children who are seeking asylum are in care because of a particular set of circumstances as it is unlikely that they will be returned to their family.

Children's placements by type

65% of the children in care in Halton live within a foster placement.



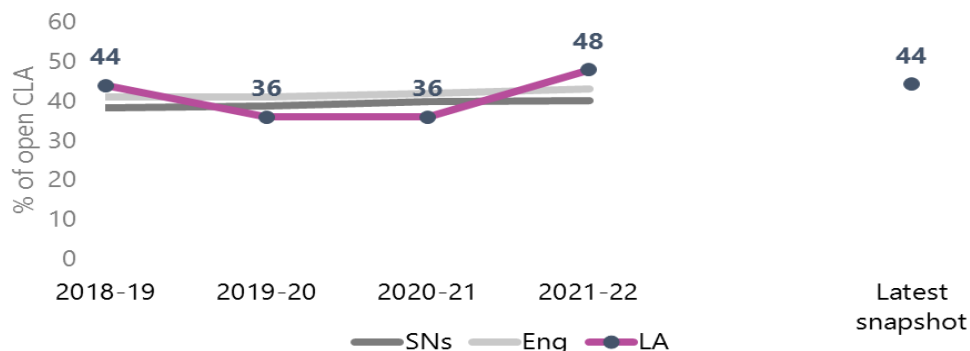
Halton percentage is above the statistical neighbours and the national levels.

| | |
|-------------|-----|
| LA 2021-22 | 61% |
| SNs 2021-22 | 73% |
| Eng 2021-22 | 70% |


38% of these placements are provided by our own in-house carers including connected persons, which is broadly in line with local and national levels.

Children in care placed out of Halton

The number of children who are not living within Halton borough boundaries was rising but has steadied to Jun-23 to be slightly above comparators.



the borough such as the right match with a long term foster carers or a pre adoptive placement. However, it is important that these children are monitored to ensure they receive the right support as they may not be able to access local services or have contact with their families if they live at a distance both of which could disadvantage them and impact on their care and development.



“Have fun
live
happily”

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND NATIONAL GUIDANCE INFORMING THIS STRATEGY

It is important to ensure that this strategy is aligned with relevant government and national legal framework and guidance. The following key frameworks and guidance have been considered when developing the content and action plan.

Children Act (1989 and 2004)

The Children Act 1989 and 2004 set out the legal framework for the protection and welfare of children in England and Wales. It includes provisions for local authorities to provide services to support children in care and care leavers, as well as duties to promote their wellbeing and consider their views.

Care Leaver Strategy (2018 - 2022)

The Care Leaver Strategy, developed by the UK government, sets out the key priorities for supporting care leavers, including access to education, employment, housing and mental health support.

Leaving Care Act (2000)

The Leaving Care Act 2000 provides the legal framework for support for care leavers in England and Wales, including a duty on local authorities to provide services to support their transition to adulthood and independence.

National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services provide guidance on the minimum standards that fostering services should meet to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children in care.

Children and Young People's Mental Health Green Paper

The Children and Young People's Mental Health Green Paper sets out the government's plans to transform mental health support for children and young people in England, including those in care.

Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations and Guidance

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations and Guidance provide detailed guidance on the planning and review of care for children in care and care leavers.

The action plan will align with these frameworks and guidance, to provide assurance that it is legally sound and supported by relevant national policies and guidance. This can also help to ensure that the actions we take are in line with best practices and support what is expected for the best possible outcomes for children in care, care leavers and those with care experience.

FOUNDATIONS OF GOOD CORPORATE PARENTING

To grow into adults that live safe, satisfying, independent and productive lives, children need to feel safe, loved cared for and supported throughout their childhood and early adulthood.

Our strategy is built on the following underpinning elements of good parenting that we want to promote.

- **Early intervention and prevention:** we believe children are best cared for by their family with the people who know and love them and living within their wider community. Coming into care is never a choice – the overarching aim is to prevent children from entering care wherever possible, through early intervention services that support families in crisis and help children return home or, move in permanently with other family members at the earliest opportunity. We will support family members to use private law avenues to achieve permanence for their children.
- **Stable and safe placements:** Where there is no alternative, children who need to remain in care should have access to stable and safe placements that meet their identified needs, including adoption, high-quality foster care, residential care, or kinship care.
- **Education and employment support:** Halton will provide education and employment support to children in care and care leavers, including access to high-quality education, training, and career guidance.
- **Health and well-being:** Children in care and care leavers will have access to high-quality healthcare, mental health and other services to support their overall well-being.
- **Transition support:** Halton will provide transition support for care leavers, including access to housing, employment, and education support to help them make the transition to independence.
- **Participation and advocacy:** Children in care and care leavers will have opportunities to participate in decision-making about their care and have access to advocacy services to support their rights and interests. Where we cannot fulfil young people's wishes we will let them know why.
- **Partnership working:** Halton promotes partnership working between agencies, including social services, health, education, and the voluntary sector, to ensure that children in care receive integrated and coordinated support.

HOW WE WILL WORK

Building relationships will always focus on family first and we will work together with parents to build trust and positive difference to their family life. We know families have the best solutions and with them, will look at every avenue of support to prevent crisis. If children do need to be looked after we will always consider a return to their family.

Positive and effective relationships are the way we will build and deliver on our foundation. We aim to build partnership working across all services and agencies involved in children and young people's care and improve outcomes for children and young people in our care. This can help to ensure that children receive the support they need when they need it so they can thrive.

- **High quality care and placements with parents:** This can include recruitment and training for carers to help them develop effective communication skills, build understanding and positive relationships with families and the children they care for. Where children have come into care and either continue to live with parents or return home, we will work closely with parents through assessment and support, to identify and equip them to manage and to keep them safe and address the reasons why their child came into care.
- **Providing opportunities for children to participate in decision-making:** This can include involving children in their own care planning and reviews and providing opportunities for them to write their own plans, chair their own meetings, give feedback and contribute to the development of services.
- **Working in partnership with families:** this strategy aims aim to involve families in decision-making wherever possible, and work in partnership with them to support the needs of the child.
- **Providing access to independent advocacy:** Children in care and care leavers will have access to independent advocacy services to support and understand their rights and interests.
- **Building strong relationships with schools and education providers:** This can include providing support for schools to help them understand the needs of children in care and care leavers and working in partnership to promote positive educational outcomes.
- **Building strong relationships with health providers:** This can include providing information and training for health professionals to help them understand the needs of children in care and care leavers and working in partnership to promote positive health outcomes.
- **Providing access to mentorship and positive role models:** This can include providing access to mentorship and positive role models, to help children in care and care leavers build positive relationships and develop a sense of belonging.

CHILDREN'S VOICES

In Halton we understand that each young person has a unique history and vision for the future. This strategy seeks to ensure that their vision becomes a reality - every child must be supported to reach their full potential, with no one left behind.

Children's experiences will always form the centre of our approach in Halton, with the foundations of this strategy agreed with young people. Our priorities respond directly to The Halton Pledge – a list of commitments to children and care leavers, developed and agreed by the young people themselves and endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Board. [The Pledge | Halton Children in Care Council \(haltoncicc.co.uk\)](https://www.haltoncicc.co.uk)

Our relational approach means we engage directly and routinely with our children and their carers, encouraging them to share experiences so that we can better understand the issues that they face and adapt services to meet their needs. Our young people also give regular feedback through their statutory reviews, and the Children in Care Council.

The corporate parenting responsibility compels services to make sure young people feel safe and secure in voicing their issues and concerns. These experiences need to be heard, considered and acted upon, with the council and partners systematically checking themselves for prejudice and bias.

We have a diverse group of looked after children in our care and will actively encourage everyone to feel confident and proud of who they are, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, sexuality or social background. Whatever their circumstances or characteristics, all our young people will receive support to make every success of their lives

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE TELL US ABOUT CARE IN HALTON?

There is a need for more houses/flats.

There is not enough choice or options, could young people be shown places?

Discuss independence starting at 16.

We need more foster carers to commit to staying put.

We need you to care more when we're sick or unwell.

It's everybody's job to listen.

Do more for us when we turn 18 years and we start living independently.

Hold Our Hands – Show us the way.

We have to trust people and be kind, we have to love and we have to listen to our carers and have hope in your social workers.



**“Believe you
can be
anything you
want**



OBJECTIVES FOR ACHIEVING THIS STRATEGY

Halton corporate parents will implement the following comprehensive set of objectives that supports the well-being, education, and life chances of children in care and care leavers and archives the strategic aims and positive outcomes.

Objective 1: Early intervention and prevention

- Develop and implement early intervention services that support families before a crisis through a range of offers and provisions, with a focus on children living within their family and preventing them from entering care wherever possible.
- Provide training and support to social workers and other professionals to identify and respond to families in crisis at an early stage and equip them with tools and resources to support families to recover as soon as possible.

Objective 2: Stable and safe placements

- If children do enter care, where possible, we will place them with family members or people they have a connection with and seek ways to legally secure this arrangement via SGO or CAO or alternative at the earliest opportunity.
- Endeavour to recruit more in house local carers and provide training and support to them to help them provide high-quality care and build positive relationships with children and their families. Ensure that children have access to stable and safe placements that meet their needs, including adoption high-quality foster care, residential care, or kinship care.

Objective 3: Education and employment support

- Provide access to high-quality education, training, and career guidance for children in care and care leavers, with a focus on promoting positive educational outcomes and helping them to achieve their full potential.
- Develop and implement initiatives to support care leavers in accessing employment, such as work experience opportunities, mentoring, and career guidance.

Objective 4: Health and well-being

- Provide access to high-quality healthcare and mental health support for children in care and care leavers, with a focus on promoting positive health outcomes and improving well-being.
- Develop and implement initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles and support the emotional and social development of children in care.

Objective 5: Transition support

- Provide comprehensive transition support for care leavers, including access to housing, employment, and education support to help them make the transition to independence.
- Develop and implement initiatives to support care leavers in building positive relationships and social networks, such as through lifelong links, mentorship and peer support programs.

Objective 6: Participation and advocacy

- Provide opportunities for children in care and care leavers to participate in decision-making about their care, and involve them in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the strategy.
- Provide access to independent advocacy services to support the rights and interests of children in care and care leavers.

Objective 7: Partnership working

- Develop partnership working between agencies, including social services, health, education, and the voluntary sector, to ensure that children in care receive integrated and coordinated support.
- Develop and implement initiatives to promote collaboration and sharing of best practice across agencies and organizations through shared training opportunities.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The strategy will be reviewed regularly to ensure that it remains relevant and effective in meeting the needs of children in care and care leavers. Any necessary changes or updates will be made as appropriate following discussions taking place at CPOG.


1. **Corporate Parenting Board**: Will agree to lead the oversight of the implementation of the strategy and monitor and evaluation progress in achieving the objective.
2. **The children in care council**: Will be regularly consulted on action progress and further areas for development.
3. **Clarify lead professional**: Each partner agency will take responsibility for the implementation of the strategy in their organisation and be a member of CPOG (the corporate parenting operational group) and Corporate Parenting Board on progress against the objectives.
4. **Engaging stakeholders**: A wide range of stakeholders, including children in care and care leavers, their families, carers, social workers, health professionals, education providers, and other relevant agencies, will be engaged in the implementation process and their views and evidence will be sought on implementation success.
5. **Providing training and support**: Training and support will be developed for all those involved in the implementation process, including staff, carers, and volunteers, to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge required to support children in care and care leavers effectively.
6. **Developing communication and engagement strategies**: Communication and engagement strategies will be developed to ensure that all stakeholders are kept informed about the objective of the strategy and that their views and feedback are taken into account.
7. **Allocating resources**: resources, will be discussed and considered to support the implementation of this strategy.

REPORTING THAT SUPPORTS THE STRATEGY

The matrix below shows the main reports that inform our work in corporate parenting. It does not exclude any other reports being requested or presented as necessary.

| Reporting mechanism | Priority | On-going Interactions |
|---|--|---|
| Corporate Parenting Annual Report | All | Every year the Corporate Parenting Board will produce a report which provides an overview of the achievement, progress and challenges in meeting the needs of Halton's children in care and care leavers who are placed both in borough and outside the borough. The report also sets out the priorities for each year. |
| Annual Virtual School Report | Education and employment support | This report provides information on attainment and achievement of children in care and compares this with previous year's performance and the local child population education outcomes. It also contains the virtual schools plans and the outcomes with key successes. |
| Independent Reviewing Officers annual report | All | This report works alongside The Corporate Parenting Annual report and gives an overview of the children in care population and comments on key successes and challenges, along with plans for the next years. |
| Complaints and compliments and advocacy | All | What children and their families tell us about our service how well we have done and what we need to improve. |
| Annual Health Report of Looked After Children | Physical and mental health and wellbeing | This report outlines the delivery of health services to children in care, reviewing performance indicators, |

| Reporting mechanism | Priority | On-going Interactions |
|--|----------------------------|---|
| | | clinical work undertaken by the LAC Health Team, service improvements and plans for further development. The Strategy will use the report to identify any emerging challenges or areas of concern that require actions. |
| Annual adoption report | Sufficiency and Permanence | Review and maintain the Foster Carer recruitment training and support, recognising the value that excellent care and support to our looked after children. Work of the panel Achieving an increased rate of adoption and placements in foster to adopt supports the stability and permanence of child in care. Work of the RAA |
| Feedback from consultations questionnaires and other ways of gaining young people's views. | | The voice of the child is paramount and influencing everything we do and decision we make. |

A vibrant, circular illustration of a park scene. The scene is viewed from a high angle, looking down at a circular area. In the center is a large white circle containing the text. Surrounding this circle is a colorful park with various people and activities. There are trees, a rainbow, a bench, a slide, a kite, a sun, and a person in a wheelchair. The background is a light pink color with white clouds.

**“You can do
anything if you
put your mind
to it**

**Head of Service
Children in Care and Care Leaver, Fostering and Adoption**

Due for review 2026

