

## **Improvement Notice**

To: Halton Borough Council ('the council')  
Municipal Buildings,  
Kingsway,  
Widnes.  
WA8 7QF

**This Improvement Notice is issued to Halton Borough Council on 21 March 2024 following the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Area SEND Inspection, published on 26 January 2024 and in response to the areas of priority action and improvement highlighted in the report.**

1. This notice is given to address the five areas for priority action and four areas of improvement identified in the report of the inspection published on 26 January 2024.
2. To comply with this notice, the following actions are required of the Council, working with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and its other partner agencies ("partners"), as set out in section 11 (1) of the Children Act 2004.

### **Improvement plan**

3. The Council's improvement plans should deliver appropriate and sustainable improvement, taking account of the views of parents, children and young people, school and education leaders and wherever possible, putting co-production at the centre of improvement activity. Plans must cover the areas of priority action and improvement areas identified in the Ofsted and CQC inspection report of 26 January 2024, as well as recommendations made by the Department, including:
  - a. improve the shared strategic oversight, governance, support and challenge to drive improvements to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND in Halton,
  - b. improve the efficiency and quality of information gathering and sharing processes across the Local Area SEND partnership,
  - c. improve the joint commissioning of services to ensure that children, young people and their families receive sufficient support to have their needs met effectively,
  - d. improve the early identification of needs and access to specialist health pathways and the support available, while children and young people wait,
  - e. improve the timeliness of new EHC plans and updates to EHC plans following the annual review process,
  - f. improve the quality of assessment, advice and planning across education, health and social care,

- g. strengthen processes for the quality assurance of EHC plans and use these to improve the quality of new and existing EHC plans
  - h. ensure that communication with stakeholders, including parents, carers, children and young people, is enhanced.
  - i. improve the pace and traction of the AP strategy.
- 4. To ensure there is clear evidence of progression:
  - a. the Council must ensure there is an improvement board, with the chair agreed by the Department and attended by key leaders across Education, Health and Care services, including the Chief Executives of the Council and the ICB, the Children Services Accountable Officer, the ICB Accountable Officer and appropriate Elected Members of the Council to a timetable agreed with the Department;
  - b. the Improvement Board must have clearly assigned accountabilities for all actions agreed, along with clear and measurable targets covering the areas of priority action and improvement areas identified in the Ofsted and CQC report;
  - c. those accountable for the actions in the improvement plans must keep the content up to date, with a risk register and mitigation plan updated in line with the meeting cycle and provided to the Improvement Board in advance;
  - d. reports to the Improvement Board should include data, analysis and evidence of the impact of improvements on the lived experience of children and families;
  - e. the Improvement Board should maintain an action and impact log which is updated at each meeting, highlighting objectives which are slow to progress and where contributions need to be strengthened.
- 5. Invitations to Improvement Board meetings must be sent on each occasion to the appointed DfE adviser, NHS England adviser and to the Department's case lead.

**Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:**

- 6. The DfE Adviser and NHS Advisers will provide regular updates to the Department of progress or concern against the areas set out in this notice; improvement against the Ofsted and CQC requirements; and any other such information relevant to the improvement journey.

**Department for Education Stocktake Reviews**

- 7. Officials or advisers from the Department will undertake reviews of progress against the improvement agenda at least every six months and more regularly where appropriate.

8. Reviews, including areas of priority action deep dives, may cover but are not exclusive to: leadership; governance; co-production; quality of workforce training and support; multi-agency arrangements including joint commissioning, Education, Health, and Social Care provision; the timeliness and quality of Education, Health and Care plans and engagement with children, young people, families and carers.
9. Prior to any reviews, the Council should provide to the Department its own assessment of improvement. This may include, but is not limited to:
  - a. progress against improvement plan objectives;
  - b. feedback from parents and carers;
  - c. clear information about local accountability and governance structure;
  - d. the documentary evidence used to plan, track and evaluate the impact of actions. This may include:
    - I. A progress update against each area of priority action and improvement area;
    - II. A dashboard of performance measures showing whether targets and milestones are being met in a timely manner; any slippage; evidence of impact and whether the local area is on track to meet the next set of milestones.
    - III. Evidence that key partners, including children and young people, families and schools are playing an active role in improving services.
10. From time to time, the Department may require that a diagnostic review or assessment is undertaken by a party agreed with the Department.
11. For any review or assessment, the Council must provide the person(s) conducting it with:
  - a. access to, and time with, staff and leadership;
  - b. accurate and up to date data on performance and quality;
  - c. facilities to carry out the reviews; and
  - d. access to minutes of meetings or any other relevant information.

### **Timescales:**

12. The Council should aim for the impact measures set out in the Improvement Plan to be evidenced by the agreed target dates. The Council should also aim for actions included in the improvement plan to be delivered by the end of May 2025 or sooner. However, the Improvement Notice will not be stepped down until sufficient progress has been evidenced, and the Minister agrees.

### **Failure to comply with this Improvement Notice by the assessment dates or poor progress:**

13. Should the Council be unwilling or unable to comply with this Improvement

Notice or should the Secretary of State not be satisfied with the Council's progress at any stage, they may choose to invoke their statutory powers of intervention (s497A Education Act 1996) to direct the Council to take any further actions deemed necessary to secure the improvements required in SEND services.

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**Signed:**

**Date:** 19/03/2024

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Mark Taylor', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mark Taylor

**Senior Civil Servant in Department for Education**