

## REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

On 15<sup>th</sup> January tragically Naeema Accha lost her life having suffered a fall on her way to St Michael with St John's school. On behalf of all councillor colleagues I would like to offer my sincere condolences to the family at this very sad time.

### **1. Children's Services Success**

You will all be aware that in November the department was rated excellent by Ofsted, making us one of the top ten performing councils in the country for our services to children and young people. The 'excellent' rating was published by Ofsted and included in the findings of the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Area Assessment of public services in the borough.

At a time when children's services nationally are under intense scrutiny and pressure, this was a welcome boost for all of us. Our 'excellent' status is largely based on the outcomes of several inspections that took place over the last year. Whilst this was excellent news and I would like to congratulate staff in the department none of us are complacent and we know our efforts must be sustained so we can continue to improve outcomes for our children and young people, especially in the difficult times ahead.

### **2. Budget challenges**

Service reviews are taking place across the department in an attempt to make efficiency saving. I am thankful to my colleagues on the Executive Board for their contribution to the department's growing pressures and would want to reassure colleagues that every effort will be made through the reviews to manage the pressures within existing budgets and develop the strategy which will continue to deliver our aspirations.

### **3. North of England Conference**

Whilst I was unable to attend the North of England Conference, feedback that I have received from Harry Devonport is that despite the weather the Conference was extremely interesting and thought provoking. There was key note speeches and debate covering safeguarding, inspiring creativity in young people and trying to understand the complexities of Child Poverty. All of these issues are extremely pertinent to us in the Borough so sharing the experience of others in discussing the challenges and opportunities, will inform our choice of effective actions.

### **4. Inspections**

There have been a number of inspections that have taken place and are worthy of note

- Appletrees Children's home received an overall rating of good; however, as this was a random inspection the only area of provision

inspected was 'Protecting children from harm'. The home was found to have effective policies and procedures, which underpin good care practices.

- Darwen St Peter's C.E. Primary school was found to be a satisfactory school overall with some good aspects of provision
- St James' C.E. Blackburn was judged as being an improving Satisfactory school overall with some good aspects of provision and particular strengths in pastoral areas.
- Newfield School was judged as being a satisfactory school overall with some good aspects of provision and outstanding engagement with parents and carers.
- St Silas' C.E. was judged as being a good and rapidly improving school overall with some outstanding aspects of provision. Almost all aspects of the school's work were seen to have strengthened significantly since the previous inspection.
- Longshaw Nursery School was judged as being a good school with outstanding strengths in the quality of care, guidance and support, and the safeguarding of children.
- Blakewater College was found to be a satisfactory school with good capacity to improve further.

## **5. Attainment**

Attainment in Primary schools was mixed in 2009, with major improvement in the assessments of children in reception classes - up to levels exceeding the national average for children securely achieving expected levels; and ongoing strengthening improvement in the performance of 7 year olds in schools. These achievements were offset by falls in performance in Key Stage 2 from the historically high levels of 2008 in the proportion of 11 year olds achieving expected levels in both English and Maths. In spite of this disappointment, it is worth noting that performance remained above that of similar local authorities.

Attainment in Secondary schools is now solely measured through GCSEs. In the most important measure – the percentage of children gaining 5 or more GCSEs with grades between A\* and C, including English and Maths – performance fell back to the levels of similar authorities (having previously been 3% above). This disappointment was countered by the continued improvement in the percentage of children achieving 5 or more GCSEs between grades A\* and C, which was above national average levels for the second consecutive year. In response, Secondary schools have redoubled their efforts to align achievement in English and Maths – to ensure that children achieving an A\*-C GCSE in one of the subjects also achieved it in the other.

## **6. Building Schools for the future**

I am delighted to report that Blackburn with Darwen, Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council Balfour Beatty Education and Partnerships for Schools have now signed the final documents to officially form a Local Education

Partnership (LEP). This financial close stage is important as it signals the next phase of the project.

Now begins the physical construction and modification of the buildings that will be the hubs of transformation for our young people and their communities. We now have a LEP with the shared expertise in education and construction between the schools, Council and private sector representatives. Working in partnership with Bolton Council the LEP will deliver 21<sup>st</sup> century buildings and help realise our vision of effective personalised learning for generations of students in Blackburn with Darwen inspiring aspirations for families and communities in the area.

## **7. Early Years**

### Believing in Breastfeeding - week of celebrations

The children's centres are planning to hold events across the network in February to celebrate their achievement of Believing in Breastfeeding status, which is part of the Baby Friendly initiative. This achievement is in recognition of the commitment of the children's centres and infant feeding co-ordination team at NHS Blackburn with Darwen towards the promotion of breastfeeding to mums and families and their commitment to making the centres breastfeeding friendly places.

To achieve the award, all children's centres staff including staff from partner agencies have undergone training over the last year to inform and raise awareness about the needs of breastfeeding mums and their babies. This has included learning about the health benefits of breastfeeding to both baby and mum, how to support parents to assist them to carry on breastfeeding and ensuring that the children's centres are sensitive to the needs of breastfeeding mums and their families. The training has been delivered to World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines and is part of a national initiative. Each centre also has a breastfeeding protocol which includes the WHO guidelines for the promotion of breastfeeding.

A baby friendly champion has been appointed in each centre to ensure that the children's centres retain this status by undertaking annual audits of the workplace and advising on the displays and information which is available to parents and carers, and ensuring they comply with guidelines.

## **8. Celebration of achievement events**

It is always heartening to begin a new year with the schools' celebration of achievement event and celebration event for children in our care. This year's CIOC event was held at Ewood Park on Tuesday 19 January and was once again extremely successful. The schools event was postponed due to weather and will now take place tomorrow 29 January.

The positive messages of encouraging and celebrating success in all its manifestations reminds us that the talent within all our young people is a key to their achievement and our satisfaction.

Finally, I know that many of you are governors and I would like to remind you that this year's Governors Conference will be hosted by St Wilfrid's on Saturday 13 March. It will be nice to see as many member colleagues as possible at the Conference and to share and celebrate the work that is done in all our schools as well as debate and discuss our agenda of shared responsibility.