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

This has been an extremely busy year so far and my report gives some of the significant activities that have taken place since January. A number of service reviews are taking place across the department in an attempt to make lasting efficiency savings. Given the extreme pressure on the many volatile budgets in the department I am pleased with the efforts of my officer colleagues managing the budget with prudence and skill. Despite their considerable efforts the budget is overspent and this is primarily as a result of expensive placements costs for children in our care. A strategy to address these spiralling costs has been developed and it is hoped that this will

### **Unannounced Safeguarding inspection**

In March the department were inspected as part of the Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements. This was a two day rigorous inspection and practice particularly in the referral and assessment team came under intense scrutiny. A copy of the letter from Ofsted has just been received and this will be brought to the Executive Board for information in June. Inspectors considered national guidance and through evidence collected found many strengths and areas of good practice. Particularly pleasing was that there were no identified priority areas for action and whilst there were a small number of areas for development these were known and efforts are already underway to improve things.

All LAs are now subject to a full safeguarding inspection and the rigour and preparation that went into the two day inspection will be continued so that we are ready for when the inspectors arrive.

### **Good Practice Visits**

#### **Special Educational Needs (SEN)**

Also in March Ofsted came to gather good practice around provision mapping for children with SEN as part of a wider national programme of visits to some LAs who they feel demonstrate good practice in these areas. Her Majesty's Inspector was impressed by what he heard and saw and said he was going away with many examples of good practice. In particular he noted that Multi-agency working is very strong, and came through in many aspects of the visit. Provision mapping is strength in Blackburn with Darwen, the LA has something different and unique in the way it delivers provision mapping. SEN support is more centralised in Blackburn with Darwen than in many others LAs, however because of the good participation with schools and the trust the schools have in the LA and panels this works well. Resources are used well. There is a strong focus on supporting needs, which comes through particularly in provision mapping which is an excellent tool with excellent value for money and impact on outcomes. The inspector commended the intelligent way that the data informs the work of the School Improvement Partners and was particularly impressed by the way the data is used to challenge schools on the identification and categorisation of issues

## **Support in schools**

Colleagues will be aware that nationally BwD Children's Services was one of only 10 LAs rated as excellent by Ofsted. As part of their pulling together good practice Ofsted visited BwD on 15 April. The lead HMI was impressed with what she saw and concentrated particularly on attainment and work supporting improvements in schools. The findings from her visit to BwD along with those from the other 9 LAs will be put together into a composite report and published by Ofsted later in the year.

## **Governors Conference**

The Governor's annual Conference took place on 13 March at St Wilfrid's school. The main theme of the Conference was safeguarding with a specific focus on governors' responsibilities for children and young people in schools. Feedback received from the Conference has once again been positive with numbers attending up on last year.

## **Building Schools For the Future**

### **Sample School Progress**

On the 8 March 2010 Blackburn with Darwen's multi-million pound school revolution was officially under construction, when Pupils helped to mark the occasion at a ground breaking ceremony to launch the new build of Pleckgate Mathematics and Computing College. Following the celebrations activities on site have moved on considerably. Key areas of progress include ground works and the formation of the new All Weather Pitch, a new haul road providing access to the site and the establishment of relocated temporary car park for the school. The school will be operational for the Autumn Term 2011.

Major construction work is scheduled to commence at the second sample school, Darwen Vale High School, in Autumn of this year and the school will be operational for the Autumn Term 2012.

### **New Project Development**

Following a robust evaluation process, by a cross-cutting evaluation team, the Stage 1 development submission for the two Building Schools for the Future (BSF) new projects (Witton Park High School and New East Blackburn Learning Community, a co-location of Crosshill Special School and Blakewater College) were approved on 9 March 2010 by the programme's Strategic Partnering Board. Approval of the Stage 1 development submission prompts commencement of Stage 2 New Project development, designed to enhance and finalise the overall design. Since approval of the submission Shine (the Local Education Partnership and delivery vehicle for BSF) has been working hard in collaboration with the Local Authority and key stakeholders, which have included school staff, students, advisors, Council departments and strategic partners, to further develop designs that will support and maximise the Council's and individual schools' visions.

Planning applications are scheduled to be submitted at the end of May. The Local Authority and Shine are committed to ensuring all stakeholders are presented with the opportunity to view and comment on design proposals. To achieve this a number of pre-planning consultation activities have been well promoted and will be delivered prior to planning application submission. These events will run from the 19 to 29 April in varying

locations within the Borough and will allow members of the community to inform development of final proposals to be submitted as planning applications.

**Key milestones for New Projects are:**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
(26/07/10)	Completion of New Project Final Approval Submission	LEP
(27/07/10)	Evaluation of the New Project Final Approval Submission	Authority
(20/09/2010)	Issue of New Project Final Approval Notice	Authority
(29/11/2010)	Commercial and Financial Close	Joint action
(Dec 10/Jan 2011)	Project Implementation	Joint action

**Early Years**

**Local management boards - the final piece of the puzzle !**

Early years has put the final piece of the jigsaw in place for their children centre "governance arrangements". A celebration event was held last month in recognition of their award winning governance arrangements.

The event saw the culmination of a period of consultation which used media as a tool to collect the views and opinions about children's centre services from children and their families. The work produced through the consultation was used to create a jigsaw that depicts the borough's sky line.

The local management boards working as a unique network has enabled the Borough's children to access a wide range of services including health, early learning and childcare, advice and guidance to support training and employment alongside a range of universal targeted and specialist family support services by pooling and aligning funding and resources to ensure equity across the borough.

This has been possible due to the strong leadership, drive and passion demonstrated by Local Management Board members and the chairs of individual boards working together.

**Families Information Service – new branding**

The Families Information Service (FIS) provides information and advice to parents and carers on their childcare options and also signposts them to other services such as employment and training advice, financial help towards the costs of childcare and accessing benefits such as tax credit, information about careers and working in childcare.

Formerly we were known as the Children's Information Service, supporting families with children up to the age of 14. The Childcare Act, 2006, extended the remit to provide information to families with children up the age of 19, this has been extended to the age of

25 for parents and carers who have a child with a disability. To reflect the new changes, the FIS has been rebranded and the leaflets and fliers from the campaign are now on display across the borough, in children's centres, health centres and GPs surgeries, schools and community centres.

### **Fathers Celebration Day – Sunday, July 4<sup>th</sup>**

Blackburn with Darwen early years excellence, key partners and Fathers Plus are planning an event to celebrate fatherhood. Children and families from across the Borough will be invited to the event, planned to be held on Sunday, July 4<sup>th</sup>. Further details will be made available via a range of media sources over the next few weeks.

### **Children and Young People's Trust**

Following on from the recent Children's Trust review session, The Children and Young People's Trust Board now has a new, streamlined structure which was recently agreed by the members of the Trust Board and the LSP.

The recent DCSF guidance on co-operation arrangements for Children's Trusts states 'that the purpose of the co-operation arrangements is to improve outcomes for children and young people.' By working in a more effective way and focussing on the key priorities identified through the Children and Young People's Plan as well as working with our newly elected Youth MP's, the Children and Young People's Trust will be better placed to 'champion' the rights of all children and young people across the Borough and to focus on improving outcomes locally for children and their families.

### **Transfer of Responsibility 16-19**

A report came to the Executive Board in February to outline the changes that took place on 1 April 2010. As part of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 the responsibility for the commissioning of education and training (of 16 – 19 year olds and for older students up to 25 for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities and for young offenders aged 10-18) has passed from the Learning and Skills Council (which has now been abolished) to the LA.

### **Capital Programme**

The annual capital programme for the Children's Services department has been approved for 2010/2011 at £26.2m (including BSF approvals of £19.3m) plus £6.6m held in earmarked capital reserves for scheme options yet to be agreed. Of this amount Children's Services directly manage £12.2 million plus funds to be carried forward for continuation of 2009/10 schemes. The Children's Services Capital programme is driven by capital priorities raised from the Condition, Suitability and Sufficiency Sections of school Asset Management Plans updated on a regular basis by Capita's Building Liaison Officers.

### **Social Work Pilot**

The Council are one of 6 Councils who were successful in bidding for grant funding to set up a 'Social Work Practice Pilot.

The Social Work Practice (SWP) will be working with young people aged 14 years and above who are in the care of the Council plus all Care Leavers. It will provide a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary service and test out whether new ways of working with these young people improve their life chances and outcomes. A great deal of work has been undertaken with the young people concerned, some of whom are also involved in the governance of the SWP. The SWP is due to move into its own premises in the next few weeks and an open day will follow.