

amw

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

The new coalition Government moved quickly following the general election forming the Department for Education (DfE) on 12 May 2010. The Department for Children's Schools and Families was therefore replaced by the DfE and takes over responsibility for issues relating to education and children's services. Already the Secretary of State has written to all head teachers inviting them to apply for Academy status. He has also written to all schools judged by Ofsted as outstanding. In Blackburn with Darwen we have 5 schools in this category; Tauheedul Islam Girls' High school, Wensleyfold CEPS, Turton Edgworth CEPS, Holy Souls RCP, and Blackburn the Redeemer. Clearly these are early days and our view about this new way of educational provision will be governed by the benefits and outcomes for all children in Blackburn and Darwen. We have also received confirmation that ContactPoint, the single national IT database for all children will be scrapped with the government seeking to develop better ways of keeping children safe. The investment made so far will not be wasted however because the government intends to use the technical expertise acquired to protect those children most in need. The aspiration of the previous government of a single national IT database for all children has gone and the most likely scenario will be that they will seek to scope a system that will focus on the most vulnerable children.

### **1. Service Reviews**

Service reviews have begun in the department to seek efficiencies as we continue to face the challenges of increasing budget pressures. One of these is the review of Young People's Services which is a comprehensive review being undertaken jointly by Children's Services and Culture Leisure and Sport. The review will ultimately make recommendations in respect of both statutory duties and a wider youth offer. The review will consider targeted requirements and seek to make clear referral pathways for service users and/or professionals seeking to ensure accessibility, and respond to need. Whilst still at an early stage, the review will inform development of a framework for future service delivery, to eliminate duplication, drive up quality and realise efficiencies.

Also worthy of mention here is the work being undertaken by Gladys Rhodes who will chair a corporate Task group to consider the health and well being of staff. 75% of the Council's workforce live within the Borough therefore a strategy to improve employee health and wellbeing and reduce sickness absence is essential. Gladys has enlisted a group of volunteers in the department to act as health and wellbeing champions and will take their ideas and suggestions through to the corporate group.

These are two examples of the innovative and creative work that is taking place in the department to realise savings and improve the health and well being of our workforce. I would like to thank my officer colleagues for the hard work that is taking place with the reviews often on top of their day jobs. I would also like to commend colleagues who have demonstrated energy, rigour and prudence in managing this year's very challenging budget situation.

## 2. Events

### Big Sing and Mini Sing

Building on previous success the Big and Mini Sing evenings at King George's Hall on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> June were once again truly inspirational. On the 16<sup>th</sup> approximately 500 infant pupils from our schools performed songs they had rehearsed, and on 17<sup>th</sup> June a similar amount of junior and secondary pupils and their schools and staff, took part in a mass singing event organised by the Music and Arts service. This was the 4<sup>th</sup> year of the big sing and it has gone from strength to strength such that demand for tickets this year exceeded supply given the capacity at King George's Hall.

### Refugee Weeks Monday 14<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2010

I was delighted to attend the event organised by the Asylum Seeker Multi Agency Forum at Jan's Conference centre on June 17. Entitled 'Simple Acts' the Conference encouraged us all to use small everyday actions to change our perceptions of refugees. The Service for Ethnic Minority Achievement (SEMA) is using the weeks to encourage schools through support with lessons and assemblies to learn about the new communities of Blackburn, why people leave their countries and how children and families build new lives

### Fostering fortnight 15 – 29 May 2010

Fostering fortnight took place in May and two recruitment events took place on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> May in Darwen Town Centre and this was followed on Monday 24<sup>th</sup> in Blackburn. Both were very well attended and the new materials produced were well received and lots of interest was shown. Whilst there has been a slight increase in enquiries, experience suggests that there is often a delay between events taking place and actual firm applications received.

### Children's Trust

The National Children's Trust Conference will be held in Birmingham in June to share the latest guidance relating to Children's Trust requirements and the Children and Young People's Plan. This should also afford opportunities for sharing good practice with other LAs and Children's Trusts going forward.

### Dragon's Den

After a successful pilot last year, fourteen of our primary schools have been involved in an exciting and innovative young enterprise project running their own businesses out of school hours. The children have shown their creativity by producing various products and merchandise that they have been selling in school, at parents' evenings and one-off school events. They will be given the opportunity to showcase (and sell) their products at a Dragon's Den type event on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2010 where they will celebrate their

achievements and compete for a variety of prizes which will be judged by a panel of local business entrepreneurs.

### **3. Inspections**

There have been a number of school inspections since my last report. In the main these have been positive with Sudell and Sacred Heart being judged good overall and St Edward's RCP having a good monitoring visit. It hasn't all been positive however, with Hawthorn's JS being placed in special measures and St Anthony's RCP being given a notice to improve. I am satisfied that through the support and challenge led by the LA both schools will make the improvements needed.

### **4. Building Schools for Future Programme**

The department is currently awaiting announcements by the government on their spending priorities, including schools' capital funding. Until then it is important to point out that no decisions have yet been taken on the programme. However, we remain hopeful that we are in a strong position, having achieved financial close for Blackburn with Darwen and Bolton schools in January this year.

#### **Approved Project Delivery**

Two schemes have reached the construction phase:

##### ***Pleckgate***

Pupils helped commence the construction phase with a sod cutting launch event which I attended in March. In May, a replacement all-weather pitch was completed in advance of the main school development and officially handed over to the Council. It is now in full use for both school and community activities managed through the local authority's culture, leisure and sport department and Blackburn Northern Sports Club.

The new school is being built adjacent to the current school and will open its doors in September 2011.

##### ***Darwen Vale***

Plans are in place for the school's temporary move to Holden Fold, starting at the end of July after the summer term and finishing when staff and students move in on September 1<sup>st</sup>. Some additional portacabins will be required and these are in the process of being organised.

A travel system for students is currently being finalised that will continue throughout the decant period.

Construction and remodelling will start at the Darwen Vale site school in July 2010 and is expected to open in September 2012.

## **New Project Development:**

Detailed designs are currently under development for Witton Park and East Blackburn (Blakewater College/Crosshill). The final proposals will be reviewed ready for approval by the BSF Strategic Partnering Board in September. A final business case for the schemes will be presented to the Council's Executive Board in September/October for approval prior to submission to Partnerships for Schools for their approval. Financial and commercial close is planned for November 2010 with construction commencing in January 2011.

As most of you will know Phil Watson has been appointed as the new chair of the Local Education Partnership, the public private partnership that will deliver the construction elements of the BSF programme, provide ICT managed services to BSF schools and in the long term facilities management services. I'd like to congratulate Phil on this appointment; his knowledge and experience will be invaluable as we move forward in partnership with the LEP.

## **5. Think Family**

The previous government proposed an approach of children's, adults' and family services providing co-ordinated and focused support, to address problems affecting the whole family. This 'think family' initiative was seen as the only effective way of working with families experiencing the most significant problems. The approach can offer intensive preventative support to families at risk, ensure service interventions start earlier and are more effective and encourage greater co-operation with the Children's Trust, adult services and other agencies. Pilot schemes elsewhere have been evaluated, and whilst confirming they are at early stages of development, do indicate many positive benefits from this approach.

In Blackburn with Darwen there are already effective partnership arrangements in place which provides a strong base from which to start. Preliminary work has started, to develop an approach based on the think family value base, including holding a Local Public Services Board Chief Officers 'Think Family' workshop and establishing a Strategic Reference Group to bring partners together to work collaboratively and drive forward locally. While still at an early stage, there is a general willingness in the Council and amongst other stakeholders, to work in a different and more co-ordinated way to address some of the challenges faced by our most vulnerable families.