

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

### Think Family

Think Family was the former government initiative which was introduced to help families most at risk. The Think Family concept is targeted at families locked into a cycle of poor outcomes and facing multiple risks and also with an emphasis on shared service responsibility for child and family outcomes. The authority is committed to applying a Think Family approach to improve the support offered to vulnerable children, young people and adults in the same family.

At the request of the Local Public Services Board a multi agency strategic reference group, led by the Strategic Director of Children's Services has been established to direct progress. The group have agreed three pilot areas which were based on a joint piece of borough-wide analysis of deprivation and wider risk factors. The pilot areas identified are Shadsworth, Bastwell and Sudell linked to Darwen Aldridge Community Academy.

### Social Care Key Issues

Child Protection activity continues to increase post 'Baby Peter' with children subject to a formal child protection plan at an all time high (210) in BwD.

The current number of children in care is 351. This represents a fall of 22 on the historically high levels at the end of December 2009. For the first time in 3 years, more children have left care in the previous 12 months than came into the care of the authority.

The reasons for children entering care remain similar, with neglect and composite reasons associated with parental life style choices and poverty predominant. The number of children coming to the attention of the authority through private law proceedings remains significant and indicates a striking level of need within the borough, even amongst those not previously referred or coming to the attention of children's services.

Demand for child care social work services in BwD has doubled since April 2008. In 2009 there have been more than:

- 7,000 'contacts' with Referral and Assessment social work service
- 3,000 converted to referrals for service provision
- 2,500 domestic violence notifications
- 1,700 initial assessments
- 800 core assessments
- 230 Initial child protection conferences
- 130 children into care

The Social Work Pilot is showing positive outcomes, ongoing discussions are occurring with Department for Education re the future and status of Social Work Pilots.

Professor Eileen Munro is currently undertaking a radical review of child protection social work (draft end October final report March!!) the expected outcomes in line with Social Work Task Force recommendations are likely to include more qualified social workers, lower caseloads, mentoring provisions, in addition to substantial amendment of the electronic case recording system (ICS). This will be a significant issue in terms of public spending cuts.

Rigorous Inspections will continue. The first year of full safeguarding inspections by Ofsted saw a third of all local authorities visited deemed inadequate by Ofsted. An inadequate judgement for safeguarding will have devastating consequences for the Council.

A remodel of the statutory social work service is ongoing in order to deliver a more targeted service.

## Schools

### School admissions

A current national review of admissions regulations is proposing that all schools regardless of their legal status (i.e. including community schools) act as its own admissions authority and thus set their own admissions policy; LAs to continue co-ordinating process of school applications and inform parents of outcome; revised code could include guidance on how admissions policies enable narrowing of the attainment gap; LAs to monitor arrangements with powers of intervention; LAs to consider appeals by parents challenging decision of or process followed by a school. If this makes its way into legislation it may produce a very varied and incoherent picture of admissions policies across the Borough.

### School place planning

The new legislation enabling establishment of academies and proliferation of free schools will make the LAs role in the strategic planning of sufficiency and suitability of pupil places in schools across the Borough very difficult and could potentially result in over provision in some areas together with a lack of diversity of provision in some wards.

The LA does not have responsibility for the school improvement function in Academies or Free Schools - currently that is provided directly from the DfE. This will make it difficult for the LA to fulfill its role in continuing to drive up standards across the Borough if there is an increase in these schools in the Borough and yet the Council will still be held accountable for standards across all schools.

Local authorities are uniquely placed to ensure fair admissions and exclusion policies as well as long term strategic planning to ensure sufficient places that offer quality and value for money. The new government's desire for a simpler, more responsive and deregulated market for school providers brings with it an even greater need for local strategic planning and co-ordination to avoid waste. It is difficult to see at this stage what the framework will be within which LAs can operate to achieve this. There is a risk of a destabilising effect on existing schools, and with it the risk that gains for some pupils and schools are at the expense of others.

## Early Years Excellence (EYE)

### Children's Centres Network

Children's Centres became statutory provision in January 2010, this statutory status brings with it a new inspection framework. Early years anticipates that children's centres will be subject to this inspection process in the near future. Each centre in the network is governed through a Local Management board; the role of the boards will require review in respect of changing priorities and changes to commissioned services.

### Sufficiency Duty

The next sufficiency assessment is required to be published by April 2011. This will evidence the Local Authorities position in respect of managing the childcare market and ensuring that supply meets demand, a key consideration is the current economic climate and effects of the recession

## Building Schools for the Future

We are aiming to reach financial close on the plans for New East Blackburn and Witton Park by mid October now that the Strategic Partnering Board has approved the plans.

The revised programme (below which is still subject to approval from Partnerships for Schools (PfS)) however it provides a timeline for the Phase 2 BSF schools within Blackburn with Darwen. As a result of the innovative partnership working between St Bedes and TIGHS, the programme has been able to accommodate the following:

- St Bede's will now be constructed using an on-site phased build arrangement with investment to be accelerated to commence June 2012. Beardwood Community High School will therefore no longer be required for the decant of St Bede's. This enables TIGHS to be accelerated in the programme.
- TIGHS will be transferred to the Beardwood site in August 2013 following the closure of Beardwood Community High School and construction/re-modelling of the new school.

Design development for St Bede's and TIGHS is due to commence in January 2011.

Design development for OLSJ and St Thomas Centre is due to commence in April 2011.