

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

DARWEN CHILDREN'S CENTRE INSPECTION – NOVEMBER 2010

AGENDA ITEM 12.5

Darwen children's centre was recently inspected by Ofsted. It is the first children's centre to be inspected under the new criteria.

Inspectors focussed on how the centre helps and supports children, parents and prospective parents to access early childhood services. They commented on how well the multi agencies involved in supporting and guiding families with young children work well together and on how well families are supported through difficult times.

Leadership and management of the centre was praised and staff were judged to be very skilful at recognising when a family is in need of help.

The centre was also seen to have improved in getting young children ready for school and mentioned the centre's commitment to involving and working with dads.

The centre was judged to be "good" overall with many outstanding features.

YOUTH SERVICES TRANSITION INTO FAMILIES HEALTH & WELLBEING

The fundamental review of Integrated Youth Support Service (IYSS) areas is still not in a position to reach final conclusion. National policy direction for both Youth Offending Team (YOT) and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Team has still not been agreed and information relating to resource allocation for the areas remains insufficient to support decisions. However all areas have been subject to significant financial reductions (both in year and full-year position) and have progressed specific area reviews in order to respond to these efficiencies, seeing on going change implemented. The up to date information contained in the review has provided details to support these actions and has therefore been utilised in a more piece meal way than was originally intended – but still sees progress as a result of the most current data and intelligence available.

CHILDREN IN OUR CARE NUMBERS

There has been an increase in Children in our Care (CIOC) numbers in the third quarter of the financial year. The total number in care now stands at 362. This is an increase of 18 children over the number in care at the end of quarter 2, even though 20 children left the care system by virtue of age, discharge of care orders or adoption.

Despite the increase in the numbers in care there are 16 fewer children in care than at the same time in December 2010.

2010/11 BUDGET

Current position

Children's Services budgets have efficiency targets embedded in 20010/11 base budgets of £2,706,700 a reduction of 7.4% at the start of the year.

In year cuts to Area Based Grant (ABG) affecting Children's Services are £1,059,800 2010/11 increasing to £1.488m in 11/12. This takes budget reductions to date up to £3,766,500 or 10.3%.

The department has worked hard to find alternative efficiencies to replace £500,000 in Commissioning, due to only part year implementation. It also had to identify £248,000

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alternative savings following ABG overlap with service review reductions already taken. The portfolio proposals were approved and included in the budgets from 8th October 2010.

Monitoring of the implementation of Efficiency Reviews in 2010/11 show that the portfolio is on target to deliver all 100% of these budget savings by 31st March 2011.

2011/12 Budgets

Local government has had some of the biggest cuts in the public sector and the impact that they will have is huge, most authorities' cuts are significantly front-loaded to 2011-12.

Children's Services portfolio have been tasked to manage the fall out of specific grants including Area Based Grant, particularly School Development Grants, and other grants received through Standards Funds. The latest estimate of specific and ABG grants lost in Children's Services alone is -£4,417,700.

The loss of Revenue Support grant and ABG by the authority means an overall reduction in cash limited budgets as each portfolio is asked to contribute to the overall gap in the Council finances.

The report of the 6th January to the Special Council recommended initial saving proposals of £22.58m of which -£4,446,500 is proposed for Children's Services Portfolio as follows.

It is expected that these savings proposed will be considered and consulted on over the next few weeks. Further evaluation is still being undertaken on School Funding, funds redirected to the academy and potential new academies, the impact of the pupil premium and the cash freeze in per pupil funding for individual schools.

Impact on local families and communities

The additional cuts to other departments / partners will create additional pressures on our children and families, particularly the most vulnerable –

- £7bn welfare budget cuts in addition to the £11bn in the last Budget – this will plunge some of our families further into poverty and push greater reliance on children and family services and support at a time when there will be a risk of these support services being heavily reduced.
- Partners are facing severe cuts and the resources pooled will be reduced which will again impact on all families and communities, especially on the most vulnerable, in the long term this may cost more –

Education and Health inequalities and safeguarding issues will increase as a result of many indirect factors as well as those directly taking the impact of the cuts, including:

- Deterioration in mental health, notably stress and depression. Depression and mental health, reliance on prescription drugs. Domestic violence and general health of families is also likely to increase and in the long term there is a risk of increase in heart disease, cancer and other illnesses that are affected by stress.

Local issues

- Statutory responsibilities must be discharged but it is recognised these will have to be delivered differently and to the minimum requirement.

- Areas that are non statutory are still critical and often have a greater impact on the wider community and feed into the outcomes linked with statutory.
- The Marmot report and Blackburn with Darwen annual public health report identify that inequalities in children's development, health outcomes, behaviour and life chances cannot be sustainably improved without integrated public service interventions to the whole family/household.
- Children and young people already highlight to us continually the need to develop a local environment that encourages them to aspire to study, work and socialise locally, this will increase with lack of training and employment opportunities and lack of attainment to meet the requirements for these opportunities.
- The cost of an inspection leading to inadequate would result in an immediate 'Notice to Improve' being issued – this would lead to an Intervention team in the Borough and they would dictate the pace of corrective actions to 'fix' and the associated costs would be very high.

AT RISK

580 members of staff within Children's Services portfolio have been put at risk following the start of the consultation period on 7th January 2011. The staff in teams affected have been asked to attend briefings to inform them of the consultation process. These briefings will be followed by individual meetings with members of staff. In order to ensure that the service areas remain fit for purpose and have the capacity to deliver services senior managers are working significantly to remodel the teams that could be affected by potential budget reductions.

ACADEMY / FREE SCHOOLS

St Wilfrid's CE High School governing body have set up a working group to consider Academy status and to initiate consultation processes involved.

The Secretary of State has approved a proposal for Tauheedul Islamic Boys Free School to proceed to full business plan stage. The Council will be consulted and the decision will taken by the Secretary of State.

BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE

Confirmation was received on December 20th from Partnerships for Schools (PfS) that the BwD capital allocation for the remaining 4 schemes would be reduced by approximately 24%. This is less than the required 40% reduction asked of all remaining BSF authorities. In terms of value this equates to a loss in funding of just under £10 million the confirmed grant is £31 million including ICT investment. The original allocation had been £50 million however the grant had already been subject to significant reduction arising from deflation in the public sector related project costs.

Detailed consideration is now being given to how this funding can be best used to deliver the original aims of the BSF programme, to transform learning communities and lives. The Council are working in partnership with its strategic partner, the Blackburn with Darwen and Bolton Local Education Partnership (LEP), to develop detailed project options that will be submitted to PfS in the form of a Stage 0 Business Case for all four remaining projects. Subject to the approval of the Stage 0 the LEP will commence design development for the first two of the four schemes, Tauheedul Islam Girls High School and St Bedes RC High School in February. The design development for Our Lady and St John RC High School and St Thomas Centre will commence later in the spring.

All four phase 1 schemes including Pleckgate High School, Darwen Vale High School, Witton Park High School and the New East Blackburn school (co-location of Blakewater College and Crosshill Special School) have already commenced construction and funding has not be affected. Pleckgate High School is on programme and will open in September 2011. The 3 other Phase 1 schemes are due to open September 2012.

SECONDARY SCHOOL LEAGUE TABLES

Secondary School Performance Tables 2010

2010 was an exceptionally good year for Blackburn with Darwen schools in the main measure of success at GCSE.

There was a massive 8% rise in the percentage of local children achieving 5 good GCSEs including English and Maths (up to 52%).

More than half of our children leaving school achieved this benchmark and over three quarters of our young people leave with 5 good GCSEs.

These figures represent a major improvement over the past 10 years - with 20% more children leaving with 5 good GCSEs including English and Maths (approximately 200 more young people); and 30% more leave with 5 good GCSEs (approximately 300 more young people) than was the case at the turn of the century.

Impact of the English Baccalaureate.

The stated purpose of the introduction of the English Baccalaureate is to encourage a greater breadth to the subjects studied at GCSE, with special focus on making geography, history and languages central to the curriculum for larger numbers of 14 to 16 year olds.

Someone achieving an English Baccalaureate would have gained an A*-C grade in each of the following

- English Language
- Maths
- Two Science GCSEs
- Either History or Geography
- A Modern Foreign Language or an ancient classical language.

When these criteria are applied nationally, 16% of 16 year olds would achieve this benchmark. In Blackburn with Darwen, the figure is just below 6% of the age group.

There are two key issues that need to be considered here:

1. Firstly, this is a retrospectively introduced measure; and the decisions that would need to be changed to influence performance – such as the choice of GCSE options – would have been taken two years before the announcement of the measure.
2. Secondly, achievement of the English Baccalaureate may not be appropriate or indeed possible for many students. It reflects a very traditional and academically focused view of what educational achievement consists of. It continues a change in emphasis from the current Secretary of State for Education away from vocational study.