

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES**COUNCILLOR MAUREEN BATESON****PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: LINDA CLEGG****DATE: 1st November 2012****LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) & CARE LEAVERS**

The number of children looked after by the local authority is currently 356, which represents a slight rise over recent months, but is still within the 340 to 360 range of the past 8 months. The number of children subject to a child protection plan is currently 157. This is the lowest monthly figure since November 2009. Since July there have been 9 more children adopted or made subject to Special Guardianship Orders.

CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE UPDATE

The Committee has been focussing on responding to the learning points from the Ofsted Inspection. The membership of the Committee is much broader with a number of our key partners such as health, education and police now fully represented. The Committee has supported our young people in the refresh of VOICE (formerly the URCare Council) and they too are now active members of the Committee offering challenge to Members.

The Committee has established three work streams focusing on awareness raising of corporate parenting, how the Council is promoting the 5 Outcomes for all looked after children and how the voice of the child is being heard and influencing design and service delivery.

The Corporate Parenting event that was cancelled in October will now be held on Saturday 24th November, 9:30-12:30, with a venue to be confirmed. The purpose of the event is to bring together Members, Officers, Foster Carers and Children in Care to hear from our children the issues facing them.

DISABILITY LINKS FORUM

As part of our on-going commitment to families of children with disabilities, we organise a quarterly forum meeting to discuss service developments and share information about what is available locally. The forum is also utilised to promote consultation.

The agenda is set by parents themselves and the topics discussed at the 6th October meeting included:

- Activities for disabled children and young people at Youth Zone
- Progress on 0-25 Pathways for children and young people with complex needs.
- Capital grant for short breaks
- Parents issues

YOUNG PEOPLE TREATED TO A DAY OUT AT BLACKBURN ROVERS

Forty four children and young people aged between 10 and 15 were treated to a day out watching the Blackburn Rovers v Wolverhampton Wanderers match. The event saw children from a range of backgrounds and from throughout the borough coming together for the outing.

This day out was made possible by an offer from Blackburn Rovers who worked with staff from the Council and Blackburn Rovers to provide these young people with this great experience.

All of the children received a goodie bag and the event concluded in the striker's lounge where they received a pre-match lunch and took part in a quiz and met Rovers' new £3 million striker Leon Best.. Some of the young people also got the opportunity to take part in a penalty shoot-out at half time.

REVIEW OF RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

A review of Residential Services is underway and a number of proposals are under consideration. Anchor Avenue has been 'deregistered' as a Children's Home but will continue to be used for other purposes, dependant on the outcome of the review. The children who were resident at Anchor Avenue already had plans in place for alternative accommodation.

PRIVATE FOSTERING WEEK (29TH OCTOBER -2ND NOVEMBER)

Private fostering is when a child (under the age of 16, or under the age of 18 if disabled) is cared for 28 days or more by someone who is not a close relative. The week is an opportunity to build on activity throughout the year but particularly focuses on raising awareness within the community and amongst our partners about the need to report these living arrangements.

An awareness event in the Mall on Halloween will promote the message that 'Private Fostering is not as scary as you think'. We are linking with the 'fostering in the community' initiative which is hosting a 'fostering fun day' event at Ivy Street Community Centre. Many of the borough's services have been invited to run information stalls alongside the private fostering stall. Fun activities include a Bouncy Castle and DJ equipment. In addition, children's centres are hosting meet and greet events focusing on individuals as they visit the centre.

ADOPTION WEEK

A new adoption recruitment campaign is just commencing and will focus activity around adoption week (w/c 5th November).

Activities will include a significant media presence on radio stations locally, within the press and also on bill boards and an advertising van. In addition information points and evenings will be held.

It is hoped that in addition to the 15 adoptive families normally approved during any one year, there will be another 8 families approved in the year 2013/14 to assist us in meeting the needs of the increasing numbers of children awaiting adoption placements in the Borough.

LEAVING CARE

The Leaving Care Team are working with RV Project, an organisation that arranges volunteering opportunities in Eastern Europe and a group of young people, including care leavers are going to Romania later this month. Whilst in Romania the young people will be decorating a local orphanage and helping to improve the lives of young children.

A pilot scheme is being developed to provide supported lodgings to care leavers between the ages of 16 and 21. This scheme will not only provide accommodation but also practical and emotional support by carers within a home environment. There are potentially six carers identified who are in the process of being assessed and approved. Once approved, the carers will be matched with the appropriate young person who will provide family based support to the young person in order for them to develop their confidence and capability to live independently.