

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES**COUNCILLOR MAUREEN BATESON****PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: LINDA CLEGG****DATE: 31st January 2013****LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) & CARE LEAVERS**

The current number of children looked after by the authority is 354, as at the end of December 1048 children were classified as 'Children in Need' and 150 children are subject to a child protection plan.

The Christmas period was a difficult time for vulnerable families with greater strains and pressures. It also brought an increased workload for our staff and many of them went that extra mile to address these demands on the service.

COMPLEX NEEDS REVIEW UPDATE

A pilot is now underway for a single 'education, health and care plan' for disabled children and young people, as part of the 0-25 complex needs review across the council and partners. The pilot will be undertaken with 15 children and their families and will report in the spring this year.

CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE UPDATE

A successful event was held at Darwen Vale school on the 24th of November with elected members, young people who are or have been in the care system, foster carers and staff. The event centred on listening to the experiences and concerns of these young people about their views of the care and leaving care system. An evaluation of the feedback from the event is currently underway and will be shared at a later date.

MULTI DIMENSIONAL TREATMENT FOSTER CARE PROGRAMME FOR ADOLESCENTS

In December, the Multi Dimensional Treatment Foster Care Programme for Adolescents was launched. Young people were involved in the development of the scheme and they renamed the programme 'Time for Change' programme or 'T4C'. The T4C programme is a very important development for Children's Services and follows on from a previously successful programme for younger children which encouraged the DFE to invest in a three year grant to help us extend the services to young people up to the age of 17.

It is envisaged that the programme, which extends the current service up to the age of 17, will help some young people involved in offending behaviour to turn their lives around and stay out of custody so that their adult lives are free from crime and its consequences.

FOSTERING AND ADOPTION UPDATE

A five day Fostering Inspection took place week commencing 21st January and all areas of the service were examined

The Adoption service held its second roundtable meeting in November, which I attended along with key partners and officers to discuss issues around adoption with a view to reducing timescales and improving outcomes for children and young people.

At the beginning of November we launched our new Adoption campaign with the help of Rovers player David Dunn. Since 5th November we have had 29 enquiries from people who want to adopt and this is compared to 14 from the same period last year. In response to the enquiries the adoption team have put on an additional preparation group and have 14 applicants attending preparation.

A Christmas stall was held on the market, promoting fostering and adoption. Staff also provided a free Christmas present wrapping service, with gift tags designed by our children, there was also face painting for children. It proved a popular attraction especially when David Dunn arrived to help.

EARLY YEARS/EARLY HELP

- **Early Help Strategy**

An early Help Strategy is being developed to move towards an early help offer with a 'thinking family' philosophy and partners are also adopting this approach. The Strategy is being advised and guided by regional developments which will ensure that we are in line with other local authorities.

- **Early Years Review Feedback**

The Early Years review continues to progress, both in looking at the way we deliver services and what we can afford to deliver in light of vastly reducing resources. Over recent months 3 Early Years Review Core Group Meetings have taken place, plus 30 consultations meetings with staff, parents and partners.

A further workshop was held on the 4th January to consider the proposals to come from the early years review.

There is an increasing number of volunteers being recruited and trained in our centres who are undertaking a variety of tasks e.g. community cafes, admin support, mentoring, supporting and running groups.

YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE

On 17th November a group of service users and staff attended a Lockdown Celebration event in Carlisle which proved successful. Along with the Trafford Youth Offending Team, the service took first prize for our Summer Arts College event in August.

The service has received notification that they have again successfully achieved 'Investing in Children' status for the fourth year running, due to the quality of the participation and consultation work they have undertaken with service users over the past year. They remain the only Youth Justice Service in the country to have achieved this.

40 young people during quarter 2 were triaged away from the Criminal Justice system, undertaking Community Reparation instead.

CHRISTMAS ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

The Blackburn with Darwen Foodbank helped a number of our families, young homeless people and young people from the leaving care service over the Christmas period by allocating food hampers. Social workers distributed donations of toys and books etc to vulnerable families which benefited many children across the borough.

Pantomime fun was enjoyed by the 83 children registered with disability link and their siblings and carers. The entire Thwaites Empire Theatre was booked to accommodate the group outing to see 'Mother Goose' and fantastic entertainment enjoyed by over 300 people.

Festive fun was also had by more than 50 children and their foster carers at this year's Christmas party at the Livesey All Age Centre. The children enjoyed face painting, table tennis, pool, games and a DJ disco. Santa also made a special appearance and all the children received a selection box.

STAFF CHANGES

I would like to record the Council's thanks to three former key members of staff who have now commenced positions in other authorities; Judith Wyllie, Jackie Gower, from Children's services, and Janie Berry, from legal services. Our thanks go to all three who have contributed greatly to the progression of the department and for their support and dedication to the children and families of the Borough.