

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

**COUNCILLOR MAUREEN BATESON**

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING  
DIRECTOR: LINDA CLEGG  
DATE: 25<sup>th</sup> April 2013**

### **Numbers of children in care and other children's social care information**

The number of children in care is steady at 353 - in the range of 340 to 360 that has been the pattern since January 2012. The current figure is 18 less than at the end of March 2011 and the lowest figure for the number of children in care at the end of March since 2009. The number of children with child protection plans is 141, having fallen through the year; and is now at a level not seen since the Autumn of 2009. Similarly, over the past 12 months the number of open cases has remained steady – at around 1,700 – a return to levels similar to the winter of 2010.

The number of contacts at the front door has remained high – typically around 800 a month; but the number of contacts that progress through for assessment has remained steady at an average of 160 a month.

### **Corporate Parenting**

Young people from the Voice Group attended the recent Corporate Parenting Committee and updated members on the regional work they had contributed to regarding their experiences of Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) and have worked with IRO's on how their relationships with young people can be improved. I am pleased to inform members that a VOICE Member and care leaver has been elected as Deputy Youth MP.

External fostering placements were considered at the Corporate Parenting Committee and the reasons why placements are made out of borough fully explored. The reasons include: large sibling groups, deaf children, mother and baby placements and cultural matches.

### **Multi Agency information sharing hub (MASH)**

The MASH is operating well at the 'front door'. It is the first point of contact for service request. The multi-agency team includes social workers, police officers, domestic abuse co-ordinators, health practitioners and has strong links with adult services and probation as well as the Third Sector.

This approach allows for the effective sharing of information across all agencies allowing for timely responses in a co-ordinated way. We have seen an improvement in initial and core assessment timescales and fewer Child Protection investigations taking place.

## **Fostering Service Report**

The Ofsted report following their inspection of Blackburn with Darwen's Fostering Service was published on 13<sup>th</sup> March. Overall, the service was judged to be 'good' and was described as 'very effective' with 'thorough assessments of carers, robust matching processes and strong partnership working with all relevant agencies'. Consequently, children and young people feel safe.

In a very positive report, the progress of children and young people in foster care was described as 'very good', with particular praise for school attendance and performance at the end of both Primary and Secondary school. The support provided by foster carers was also highly regarded, as was the local authority's ability to place children in stable placements with their brothers and sisters.

The report identified a limited number of areas for improvement and these are already being addressed by the service.

## **Early Help Strategy North West**

The Early Help Strategy is progressing well. The vision of 'the right help, in the right place, at the right time' for our children and families is at its heart.

National Research over the last two years has concluded that the earlier you intervene with those families who are 'at risk' of developing problems, the better. The help needs to be targeted and across agencies for the best outcomes.

Key partners such as health and the police are committed to the same philosophy and are working in their own service areas on what 'Early Help' looks like for them. The aim being that the various disciplines will bring their strategies together for a Blackburn with Darwen Early Help approach across the borough targeting early those families likely to escalate into high cost services. Our next steps involve working with our key partners to collectively drive this approach.

A regional launch of the North West Early Help Strategy took place on 18<sup>th</sup> March which was attended by myself, Councillor McFall and Officers. The North West authorities are all committed to this approach.

## **Childrens Centres Consultation (11 Mar 2013 – 19 Apr 2013)**

A formal consultation process detailing a proposed new model for the boroughs children's centres is now underway. A consultation document and survey has been made widely available and can also be accessed at [www.urbwd.com](http://www.urbwd.com). Local meetings for users of the services, residents and community representatives took place in early April to provide the opportunity to disseminate information and obtain views. In addition, meetings with key partners will also be held.

This forms the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of consultation to inform the review of children's centres. Following this period the Local Authority will consider the responses received before progressing to a final six week representation/consultation

period. All responses received will be considered by the Executive Board before a final decision is taken on the proposals.

### **Adoption update & recruitment campaign**

Between April 2012 and the end of March 2013, 29 children have been placed for adoption, 17 adoption orders have been made and 25 Special Guardianship Orders approved.

The numbers of children with an adoption plan varies from week to week but has stabilised in the mid 50s.

To build upon the recruitment work of National Adoption Week in November 2012 and maintain momentum, a steady flow of adoption activity is timetabled for the year. This includes fostering and adoption information points at Asda (Clayton Green), Royal Blackburn Hospital and Darwen Market and adoption advice evenings at Little Harwood Children's Centre. In addition, the team delivers community group presentations and attends residents meetings.

### **Fostering update**

A recruitment campaign focusing on the fostering for young people aged 11+ took place at the end of March and included:

- Media campaign – 'flooding' the media market for two weeks (also incorporating adoption)
- Targeting agency carers and childcare professionals by direct contact methods
- Targeting businesses that are facing job cuts and job losses.

The aim is to recruit 15 new carers for teenagers for the Multi Dimensional Treatment Foster Carer Programme (adolescent model and mainstream).

22 people attended fostering training over a weekend in March.