

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

COUNCILLOR FRANK CONNOR

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: LINDA CLEGG
DATE: 26 September 2013**

NUMBERS OF CHILDREN IN CARE AND OTHER CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE INFORMATION

As of the end of July 2013 there were 355 children in care – since January 2012 the numbers of children in care has been in the range of 340 to 360. The number of children subject to Child Protection Plans reduced to 161, similar to figures in April 2013. The number of open cases has reduced to 1611.

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.

CHILDREN'S CENTRE REMODEL UPDATE

Following extensive consultation with parents/carers, staff, partners and local residents, final approval was given at the Council's Executive Board on the 8th August 2013 for remodelling the boroughs network of children's centres. Children's centre services have been reviewed and tough choices made as part of the Council's efforts to meet the £30m funding gap set by government.

The new model will see eight designated children's centres (the hubs), supported by partner and community services in the remaining five children centre buildings (the spokes/satellites). The hubs will continue to offer services, including nursery education, health services, training and return to work advice, although they will no longer provide full day care. The Council is confident that the new hub and spoke model will continue to effectively meet the needs of children, families and our local communities.

SUMMER ARTS COLLEGE

For 3 weeks 10 young people involved with the Youth Justice Service attended a Summer Arts College at Crosshill on Shadsworth Road. The event was funded by a successful grant bid and saw young people undertaking arts-based activities designed to improve literacy and numeracy skills, under the guidance of artists from the Living Well Trust.

Participants showcased their work to officers, referring workers, parents and carers at a celebration event on the 23rd August. 10 young people achieved Bronze Arts Awards and in addition 8 achieved Bronze Asdan Awards with 1 Silver Award and 1 Gold. Awards were presented by Linda Clegg and Sally McIvor.

FOSTER CARER RECRUITMENT

There has been a significant rise in the numbers of enquiries to foster over the last few months and as a result 13 new families will have been approved

between July and September, with a further four families currently being assessed. This should increase in-house capacity quite significantly. Recent recruitment activity has included attendance at the Blackburn canal festival and the play day at Witton Park. In total 18 new enquiries have been received in the last quarter which again is very positive. Further recruitment is due to take place within the Muslim community in conjunction with the Lancashire Council of Mosques and discussions are also on going with local Churches to see how they can support our campaign.

ADOPTION FEES

Recent regional data confirms that we have the highest number of looked after children with an adoption plan (24% of children in care). This confirms the success of the strategy in bringing the right children into care and ensuring that children leave care through legally secure permanent routes if they cannot return home.

The challenge associated with this is the fact that those 89 children with an adoption plan all require a placement, and there has been recent government pressure to align all adoption placement fees between the voluntary sector and local authorities (backdated to 1st April 2013). This more than doubles the fees for most of our children, from the previous regional fee of £14,000 per placement to the new fee of £27,000 plus a £1,500 support fee per child. This is creating a significant budget pressure, however the long term benefits are obvious for the children involved and also for the department as those children will cease to be looked after by the local authority.

EARLY INTERVENTION PIONEERING FOUNDATION

Children's Services Early Help service has been named as one of the 20 Early Intervention "*Pioneering Places*" by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF). This will allow the EIF to learn what works, using real life examples as a working evidence base, in order to address the central question around how we deliver Early Intervention to the best effect. The EIF will provide expert advice and support, as well as acting as a link between authorities.

This supports the Council's Early Help Strategy for Children, Young People and their Families in breaking the cycle of deprivation and poverty and improve outcomes for children and families. Tackling issues early and working in strong partnerships with other agencies has achieved positive outcomes for families, including improved school attendances, building confidence in parents and children and helping to create stronger families within the Borough.