

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

COUNCILLOR FRANK CONNOR

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: LINDA CLEGG
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EARLY HELP STRATEGY LAUNCH

Over 60 senior key partner representatives attended the launch of the Early Help Strategy on 4th October. Their attendance and support is vital to translating the strategy into everyday practice across the Borough. The strategy is a multi-agency document which has already generated significant commitment from partner organisations to work together to improve outcomes for children, families and communities.

After signing a pledge to support the implementation of the strategy, key representatives met with the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) to discuss next steps. Having recently achieved pioneer status from the EIF as one of only 20 pioneer places in the Country, we will receive support, expertise, advice and consultation, which will guide the development and delivery against the early help offer locally.

3 neighbourhood events took place in October to roll the strategy out to partners and stakeholders; a focus for the events was on ensuring responsibility to the emerging action plan as a vehicle for implementation of the strategy.

ASSESSED & SUPPORTED YEAR IN EMPLOYMENT (ASYE) SUCCESS

Five out of six newly qualified social workers successfully completed their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) in October.

The assessment of competence is based upon a management review of the years' work, a critical reflective written assignment and the submission of a work folder developed throughout the year.

FOSTER CARER RECRUITMENT

The Fostering recruitment strategy has identified the need to focus recruitment on long term carers and Asian heritage carers. The movement of children to long term carers is important as it means that it frees up more capacity within short term placements for children and young people newly arriving into care. In addition, some young children from Asian backgrounds have been placed with external agencies in the past year because of a lack of appropriate local placements. In the next 6 months Children's Services plans to work with both the Muslim Welfare Institute and the Lancashire Council of Mosques to address this issue and to recruit more Asian heritage foster carers.

Between 1st July and 30th September there were 9 newly approved mainstream fostering households, generating 15 new placements.

A total of 9 information points were held between June and September at key locations including Asda, Blackburn and Darwen Markets, and the Royal Blackburn Hospital. A total of 22 people were spoken to who expressed an interest in fostering.

ADOPTION UPDATE

30 children were placed for adoption between April and September, which is an increase of 10 placements compared with the same period last year. Blackburn with Darwen has the highest proportion of children in care with agreed plans adoption in the North West (24% of all those in care).

The department is expected to hit the 'stretch target' for approval of adopters which is set at 25 for the year and agreed between the authority and government. A new and extensive adoption recruitment campaign strategy is currently being developed.

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

As of the end of September 2013 there were 355 children in care. Since January 2012 the numbers of children in care has been consistently within the range of 340 to 360. The number of children subject to Child Protection Plans has risen to 174, similar to figures in August 2012 and in line with expected levels. The number of open cases has continued to reduce since its peak in the winter of 2011/12 and now stands at 1,591.

VOICE GROUP 'BAKE OFF' FUNDRAISER

On Friday 6th September a number of young people from the VOICE group raised £135 for Lancashire Hospice by baking and selling cakes and treats to council staff.

The Voice group is a team of care-experienced young people who provide a voice for looked after children and care leavers so they can influence the design, delivery and development of services.

The young people wanted to give something back and help other people given the support that they had received in their own lives.