

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

COUNCILLOR FRANK CONNOR

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: LINDA CLEGG
DATE: 25 SEPTEMBER 2014**

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

At the end of August 2014 there were 325 children in care. Since January 2012 the numbers of children in care have been consistently within the range of 340 to 360 but during the last quarter we have seen a further reduction of looked after children. The number of children subject to Child Protection Plans has dropped significantly to 173. The number of open cases has continued to reduce since its peak in the winter of 2011/12 and now stands at 1,435.

LEAVING CARE FOOTBALL TEAM NATIONAL TOURNAMENT WIN

In July, seven young men (aged 16 – 24) from the Blackburn with Darwen Leaving Care Team took part in the National Leaving Care Football Tournament in Bolton. 8 teams from across the North West participated with the Blackburn with Darwen team winning the tournament!

This was an excellent result as for the last 5 years the team had been runners up. The players are excited and proud that Blackburn with Darwen will be the 2015 tournament hosts.

CELEBRATION OF ACHIEVEMENT EVENTS FOR CIOC 2014

This year the Celebration of Achievement events for Children in Our Care (CIOC) was held at The Youth Zone with a Football World Cup theme. We celebrated the achievements of secondary aged young people and care leavers on 22nd June. Twenty six young people received awards for a variety of achievements including 100% school attendance, learning new skills and completing university studies.

For the primary school aged event, thirty-two children received awards for the brilliant progress that they had made over the last 12 months. We celebrated children who had made far better progress in school than their peers, had achieved 100% attendance at school, excelled in sporting activities or turned around their attitude and behaviour in school.

The events highlighted the many talents of children and young people in our care.

SUMMER ARTS COLLEGE

From 4th August to 22nd August 2014, ten young people involved with the Youth Justice Service attended a Summer Arts College at John Smethurst Nursery. The event was funded by a successful grant bid awarded by Trinity College, London and saw young people undertaking arts-based activities to improve literacy and numeracy skills.

Artists from The Living Well Trust charity facilitated the workshops which included writing, filming and recording their song lyrics. At the final day celebration event participants showcased their work to staff, parents and carers. The hard work and dedication from the young people paid off, with 6 presented with Bronze Arts Awards and for the first time in Blackburn, 6 young people achieved Silver Arts Awards.

INVESTING IN CHILDREN AWARDS

The Investing in Children UK Membership Scheme recognises and celebrates examples of imaginative and inclusive practice with children and young people.

The scheme's assessors met with four care leavers and two staff representatives in June and subsequently the Leaving Care Team was granted the 'Investing in Children' quality assurance mark. Organisations applying for the award have to demonstrate dialogue with young people that leads to change. The children and young people were actively involved in the process by providing evidence, and the decision to award membership ultimately came from the children and young people themselves.

PRIVATE FOSTERING WEEK

The Borough's Private Fostering awareness week took place in July to encourage more families who are looking after someone else's child for 28 days or more to formally notify the Council. The purpose is to ensure that all children are safe and for the department to provide vital information and support to the carers, from parental advice to claiming additional benefits and funding for essential items.

Activities across the week included two family treasure treks events with 28 clues and the launch of a Facebook page, with support from community centres, for families to enter a photo competition celebrating family life.

A strategy to raise awareness of private fostering amongst professionals is also underway with information on council employee's payslips and schools application. We are seeking support from our colleagues in health and the police regarding sharing the message about private fostering within their workforce.