

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

COUNCILLOR FRANK CONNOR

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: LINDA CLEGG
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NUMBERS OF CHILDREN IN CARE AND OTHER CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE INFORMATION

At the end of February 2015 there were 318 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 two quarters we have seen a marked reduction in the number of looked after children. The number of children subject to Child Protection Plans is 183. The number of open children's social care cases has dropped over the last quarter to 1525 and this remains much lower than its peak of 2034 in the winter of 2011/12.

IMPROVED OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The borough's strategy for looked after children over the past 6 years to improve outcomes and move children through the care system has proved a success. National comparative data on looked after children published in December showed that Blackburn with Darwen:

- Is in the lowest 2% of local authorities for children in care aged 10 or older;
- Is in the lowest 10% of local authorities for children placed with private providers;
- Has the lowest proportion of over 10 year olds amongst those entering care for any local authority in England;
- Has the lowest proportion of children in care placed in residential provision in the North West; and in the lowest 5% nationally;
- Is first in the entire country for the proportion of children leaving care through permanent options (Adoption, Residence Order, Special Guardianship Order);
- Has the second highest proportion of those leaving care leaving through adoption in England; and
- Is in the top 10% of authorities nationally for the proportion of children leaving care to permanent options (Adoption, Residence Order, Special Guardianship Order) scaled against the total number of children in care.

ADOLESCENT SUPPORT UNIT OPEN DAY

Lytham Road Adolescent Support Unit (ASU) opened its doors for two days in January and February to showcase the service to 30 local authority representatives from across the UK.

The open days were held following a presentation by Karen Barrick, Head of Service for Permanence, at the National Children and Adult Services Conference in November 2014 on the role that the unit plays in keeping children and young people out of the care system.

LEAVING CARE NEW PREMISES

The opening of refurbished premises in Anchor Avenue has filled a gap in provision for young people moving from foster care or residential care into their own tenancies. The former children's residential home building was re-opened in January as a 'trainer house' for up to 3 young people aged between 16 and 21, alongside office space for the Leaving Care team.

The aim of the project is to encourage young people to learn the skills required to maintain their own tenancy and find employment. Staff are available on site to provide young people with hands-on support to develop the skills necessary for independent living, such as cooking, household chores, money management and self-care skills. Once ready, the young person will move into their own tenancy through a local housing provider or in private rented property.

REDUCTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

The latest figures from the Youth Justice Board show that the number of young people entering the criminal justice system in Blackburn with Darwen is the lowest since recording began and compares favourably to the rest of the region and country.

There were 45 young people entering the criminal justice system between October 2013 and September 2014, compared with 185 for the same period in 2008. The success is driven by Blackburn with Darwen Youth Justice Service's robust policy of identifying young people early and delivering appropriate interventions rather than post sentence. In addition, by working closely with partners and training staff in restorative justice, the Youth Justice Service has been able to effectively address and prevent the challenging behaviour of some children.