

**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES
COUNCILLOR MAUREEN BATESON PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: LINDA CLEGG
DATE: 16 JULY 2015**

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

At the end of May 2015 there were 321 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 three quarters we have seen a marked reduction in the number of looked after children. The number of children subject to Child Protection Plans is 197. The number of open children's social care cases has dropped over the last quarter to 1514 and this remains much lower than its peak of 2034 in the winter of 2011/12.

17 children were adopted in the last six months, totalling 44 over the year. This is the highest ever number of children adopted in 12 months in Blackburn with Darwen. 16 children were placed in adoptive placements.

ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE MEMBERS FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Cllr Pat McFall continues as Assistant Executive Member for Children's Services with the responsibility for Children with Disabilities. Cllr Julie Gunn is a welcome addition to the portfolio as Assistant Executive Member with responsibility for voice of the child and participation.

FOSTER CARE FORTNIGHT (1st -14th JUNE)

"Take a Selfie, Change a Life" was the theme for this years' Foster Care Fortnight recruitment campaign. The Fostering Service took their pop up photo booth to destinations across the borough to publicise the 'Letsfoster.co.uk' website and Facebook page. Over 200 members of the public took part in the campaign and the images were shared with over 10,000 people on Facebook over the two weeks.

CHILDRENS' RIGHTS TRAINING

The successful 'Total Respect' children's rights training pilot is being extended to local authority staff and Blackburn with Darwen agencies who work with children and young people. The training is delivered by two care leavers and written by young people who have experienced what it is like to receive health and social care services. The training covers areas such as effectively listening to young people, the right to participation and young people's involvement in policy development.

ARTWORK SUCCESS FOR JUNIOR VOICE MEMBER

Artwork painted by a local 10 year-old-boy entitled "I Love Life" has been chosen for a new charity calendar as part of a national competition.

The boy is in local foster care and painted the heart to show how happy he is with his carers. It was the only painting chosen for the calendar, as all the other winning entries were photographs.

In a comment about the painting, he said: "I love life because you get to do more things and get more chances to have a better life than at home. Life with my foster carers is great." It is Community Care's third annual charity photo competition. Called 'Inspiring Images of Social Care', the 2016 calendar celebrates the dedication of people working in social care and the achievements of people they support. The calendar will be sent out to thousands of social professionals across the country.

The painting is on display for the duration of the Council Forum meeting.

CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AWARENESS TRAINING

The majority of Members have now attended Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) training delivered by the Engage Team. Two sessions took place in November 2014 and a further session in June 2015. The training focuses on the history of the Engage Team, the types of sexual exploitation, the signs and symptoms of CSE and the strong arrangements that exist in Blackburn with Darwen to respond to and tackle CSE. The training has received some positive feedback.

It is important that all Members, including new Members, have received this mandatory training. A further session will be delivered in the 2015/16 municipal year for those who have not yet managed to attend.

YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE PERFORMANCE

The latest figures from the Ministry of Justice show that during the calendar year of 2014, there were 34 young people who entered the criminal justice system in Blackburn with Darwen. This is 53% fewer than the previous year and is one of the largest percentage reductions amongst all Youth Offending Teams, making Blackburn with Darwen one of the best performing areas in the country in this area. In addition, 80% fewer girls and young women were being supervised by the Service on Court Orders in March 2015 than at the same time the previous year.

This strong performance has been achieved by early intervention, strong partnership working and regular open dialogue with young people.

CHILDREN'S CENTRE NETWORK SUMMER EVENTS

Over the summer holiday period the network of children's centres will deliver a range of themed fun groups and activities for families with children up to the age of 8. Each week there will be an event in one of the children's centre hubs and this will continue for the six week holiday period. The Outreach team will work with Young People's Services to support a wide range of community events taking place across the borough on Saturdays.

The community cafes, toy library service and children's libraries and health services will continue to operate as usual.