

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

As at 23rd November there were 343 children in care which is a rise of almost 30 children over the summer period. This rise returns the borough to levels closer to those in similar authorities, following a period when the numbers of children in care was significantly lower than one would expect. It also reflects a continued rise in the number of children in care nationally. Recent national figures show that there are 4,000 more children in care in 2015 than there were in 2011, over 1,100 of whom are from the North West. This rise in the number of children in care also reflects changing demographics and larger numbers of children and young people in England.

The number of children subject to Child Protection Plans was 170. The number of open children's social care cases has further dropped over the last quarter to 1429 and this remains much lower than its peak of 2034 in the winter of 2011/12.

15 children have been adopted since April 2015, and 34 children are placed in adoptive placements.

REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY

The Adoption Service is joining up with other local authorities to form a single adoption agency – further helping children to find their families.

The Department for Education has announced that, Blackburn with Darwen, Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Rochdale and Tameside Councils, in partnership with Adoption Matters and Caritas Care Voluntary Adoption Agencies, have been successful in their bid to form one of the first Regional Adoption Agencies.

The Regional Adoption Agency will bring together some of the region's best performing adoption agencies from the statutory and voluntary sectors to form a single, regional agency which will deliver improved outcomes for children who need adoptive parents across six Local Authority areas.

BABY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE (BFI) – STAGE 2 ASSESSMENTS

Children's Centres are celebrating after passing the second stage of the assessment process on their journey towards achieving a prestigious 'Baby-Friendly Award.' Assessors commented that the Children's Centres provided 'unique and outstanding' support for families.

The Baby-Friendly initiative recognises the high standard of care given to pregnant women, mothers and their babies. It was set up by Unicef and the World Health Organisation and in the UK works with local authorities to protect, promote, and support breastfeeding and responsive bottle feeding, as well as to strengthen mother-baby and family relationships.

CHRISTMAS EVENTS

A whole host of Christmas activities are taking place for children and families in children's centres and residential homes this year including Christmas fairs, parties and a special outing to the 'Aladdin' pantomime for the Apple Trees Sibling Group. 12 young people from the Disability Links group will once again be decorating the

Darwen Market Christmas Tree and young people from the Adolescent Support Unit are staging a 'Christmas Bake Off' competition.

Children's Services staff will be on hand throughout the festive period to support children and families.

NATIONAL TOP SPOT FOR THE ADOPTION SERVICE

The local authority's adoption service has been recognised as achieving the highest percentage of children leaving care through adoption nationally for 2014/15 (37%). Of the 153 local authorities measured, only three other authorities achieved more than 30% with the majority scoring less than 20%.

Adoption is always the best outcome for children who for all different reasons cannot live with their birth parents.

Fostering and Adoption Promotion Activity

Adoption made it to the big screens at Blackburn Rovers when a number of players recorded their thoughts on the importance of family as part of National Adoption Week in October. The FanZone hosted an information stand where fans joined in and shared their thoughts too.

As part of the campaign, promotional activity also took place at a Preston Black History Group event to raise awareness of the need for adopters within the Black African and Caribbean community.

Also in October, Tunstill's Bakery in Darwen played host to a fostering event to share the benefits of fostering with local people. Foster carers and staff erected their pop-up photo booth outside the bakery and members of the public posed with a special cupcake. This increased the profile of the fostering service's 'Let's Foster' Facebook page which contributed to 29 new enquiries from prospective foster carer households during October.

INVESTING IN CHILDREN ACCREDITATION

Four services within Children's Services received accreditation for 'Investing in Children' membership; Children in Our Care, the Fostering Service; Independent Reviewing Officers and the Treatment Foster Care Oregon team (formerly Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care).

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 children and young people to discuss how they are able to influence change and decision making and the decision to award membership ultimately came from the children and young people themselves.

EARLY YEARS UPDATE

The responsibility for the commissioning of Health Visitor services has transferred to the local authority. This comes at the same time as the government suspends the Ofsted inspection programme for children's centres, pending a review, and begins a review of funding attached to the proposed 30 hours childcare offer.

Children's Services and Public Health will jointly review the boroughs early childhood offer in line with responsibilities for the delivery of the Healthy Child Programme to ensure that the authority is in a position to respond to any changes following the government review.