

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

As at 6th April there were 349 children in care. The number has been steady at this level over the past quarter, but represents a rise across the year as a whole. 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 is 219 and 438 children have Child in Need plans. The number of open children's social care cases has reduced over the last month to 1508 and this remains much lower than its peak of 2034 in the winter of 2011/12.

30 children have been adopted since April 2015, and 21 children are placed in adoptive placements.

SHADSWORTH CHILDREN'S CENTRE INSPECTION

Shadsworth Children Centre is celebrating after it's nursery provision was judged outstanding by Ofsted in January. The setting retained the grading it previously achieved in 2012 and was judged outstanding in all areas including leadership and management, teaching and learning, personal development and outcomes for children.

The inspection observed the day to day interactions between staff and children, and the Inspector talked to children about what they thought about their nursery. Parents also had the opportunity to speak with the Inspector about the quality of the provision.

During her feedback to the team, the Inspector expressed how hard it would be to keep her report concise because there were "too many strengths to actually record".

AWARD RECOGNITION FOR CARE LEAVERS

Two care leavers have won awards for their campaign work on children's rights for children in care and care leavers. Sammy Partington and Bex Robson-Lang received the SLYNCS 'Young Leaders' award in recognition of their achievements in the local community. Both Sammy and Bex made a significant contribution to last year's Corporate Parenting Conference by co-hosting and facilitating the event and the 2016 conference is planned for September.

Sammy was also awarded the Blackburn with Darwen 'One Voice-Youth of the Year Award' in February for her work to raise awareness of the issues faced by children leaving care. Sammy has attended various local, regional and national events to challenge and influence decision makers. The One Voice award recognises the dedication of local people who are making a difference in the borough.

CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT REVIEW

The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment has been reviewed for 2016 to assess the demand, supply, availability and quality of childcare within Blackburn with Darwen and identify any significant changes in the childcare market. Whilst the number of children aged 0–14 years has risen in the borough since the 2011 Census, so too has the number of childcare providers. The high number of vacant childcare places currently available informs that there are currently sufficient places to meet demand.

The assessment also highlights that the quality of childcare provision has improved in the last 12 months and the majority of parents and carers said that childcare they access provides value for money and is of a high standard. Most parents and carers expressed that there is a good choice of childcare in Blackburn with Darwen and are satisfied with the childcare they use. Some respondents indicated that childcare is too expensive, however, with the exception of after school childcare, Blackburn with Darwen is below both regional and national averages with regards to childcare costs.

INVESTING IN CHILDREN ACCREDITATION

The department is encouraging partners to demonstrate that they are listening to children and young people by applying for 'Investing in Children' accreditation. The Investing in Children UK Membership Scheme recognises and celebrates examples of imaginative and inclusive practice with children and young people.

To date 13 teams across the council have been awarded the status including four commissioned services delivered by Child Action North West. Two further organisations, the Wish Centre and Nightsafe, are also committed to encouraging participation with children and young people and are currently going through the accreditation. The award process provides an opportunity for children and young people to experience a sense of being active citizens, influencing the world around them.

FUNDRAISING EVENTS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

For families with children with a disability finding the right holiday location and accommodation can be quite a challenge. In order to assist with providing a much needed break for families, the department has set out to raise £20,000. So far approximately £2,900 has been raised through a range of fundraising activities including a fashion show, clothes exchange, numerous raffles, a cake bake and an auction. This has been a great effort from all who have been involved.

REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY

Following the formation in 2015 of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) with Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Rochdale and Tameside, alongside two voluntary adoption agency partners, work has been taking place to consider models for delivery. Consideration has also been given to the legal entity of the RAA and the next stage will be to consider governance and financial arrangements.

The most important aspect of any change is that whatever emerges improves the timeliness and availability of adoption placements for children and allows for much greater flexibility in the provision of service. The Executive Board will be updated on these developments at a future meeting.