

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

There has been a general rise in demand across Children's Services as a whole from Early Help (there are now over 400 CAFs), right through to the numbers of children in care. This is partly driven by more children and young people being assessed, but it is also focused on particular age bands, with the number of teenagers that the department is working with rising in particular. This group tends to have more complex issues and while we have our outstanding and nationally recognised Adolescent Support Unit, children entering care from this group are much more likely to go into more expensive agency placements and this is putting a pressure on commissioned placement budgets.

As at 26th September there are 366 children in care, 273 children subject to Child Protection Plans and 572 children with Child in Need plans. The number of open children's social care cases has risen to 1778, up from 1686 in July.

20 children have been adopted since April 2016, and 18 children are placed in adoptive placements.

BABY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE (BFI) AWARD

The Children Centre network has achieved the prestigious Baby Friendly Initiative (BFI) award, having worked over a number of years to evidence high standards of support for pregnant women, new mothers, babies and families.

The Baby Friendly Initiative was established by UNICEF and the World Health Organisation as a global programme to provide a practical and effective way for health services to improve the care provided for all mothers and babies. UNICEF assessors described the Children's Centre assessment outcome as "*robust and outstanding*" and commented that Blackburn with Darwen Children's Centres are "pioneers" being one of the first networks of Children's Centres to achieve the award in the UK.

CORPORATE PARENTING CONFERENCE

The 2016 Corporate Parenting Conference took place on 17th September at Darwen Vale High School. The event brings Children in Care, their Foster Carers and Care Leavers together with Elected Members and Council Officers with 90 people in attendance. The purpose is to raise awareness of current issues for children in care and care leavers and discuss possible solutions and service improvements.

'Investing in Our Futures' was the title for this years conference and themes for discussion included education and access to employment and apprenticeships. 30 children in care and care leavers attended the conference with many sharing their experiences of being in care.

THE LIMES PROJECT

The Limes Project, originally named 'Challenge to Care', is underway to provide intensive programmes for children and families to prevent the need for children becoming 'looked after'. All families in the programme are subject to child protection procedures and are at

a stage where conversations have taken place with legal representation about the potential for a child entering care.

The team, based at 'The Limes' in Darwen, delivers intensive support packages focused on home environments, routines and boundaries, relationships and family functioning along with addressing any unmet needs of parents.

A "Saturday Club" operates on alternate Saturdays mornings and children are provided with breakfast and lunch in addition to undertaking activities and direct work on wishes and feelings.

NORTH WEST LEAVING CARE FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT WIN

The Blackburn with Darwen Leaving Care Football Team has won the North West Leaving Care Football Tournament, beating the hosts and previous winners from Wigan 5-0. In total 11 teams of care leavers participated from across the North West and the 8 young men aged 15 to 21 from Blackburn with Darwen were unbeaten.

Throughout the year the young men participated in weekly training and matches facilitated by The Foyer. Coaching is held all year round and as part of the programme healthy food options and conflict resolution is discussed.

LONG SERVICE FOSTER CARER AWARDS

In September, 28 Foster Carers were acknowledged for their support and presented with long service awards at the Foster Carer Forum at Livesey Children's Centre. The awards and certificates were presented in recognition of their dedication to the children and young people of the borough which totals nearly 500 years between them - with 5 carers providing care for over 30 years.

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES FORUM

I, along with Cllr McFall and Cllr Gunn, attended the launch of a forum for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in June. The first meeting was attended by 13 children and young people and their parents and carers, and the majority of children had complex needs and disabilities. The event focused on building relationships between the children and the staff that will be supporting them to express their views, choices and opinions.

The children were asked to build a wishing tree to share their aspirations and the majority of "wishes" were simple things such as cycling, having nails painted, enjoying arts and crafts and playing more team games.

The children were asked about current leisure opportunities, what type of activities they access and what they might like to do in the future. At the same time a similar exercise took place with parents and carers on their needs and aspirations.

A wealth of information was collated from the first meeting and a second forum is planned for October.