

NUMBERS OF CHILDREN IN CARE & CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE INFORMATION

There has been a general rise in demand across the board in Children's Services from Early Help (there are now 417 CAFs), right through to the numbers of children in care. The commission with Skylakes has had the desired effect with a considerable reduction in caseload numbers which is leading to a more timely response for our children and families. To reduce caseloads further to an acceptable level, the department is continuing to implement the social work team remodel and recruit experienced social workers.

We continue to see a rise in the number of teenagers open to the department. 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 4th April there are 376 children in care, 324 children subject to Child Protection Plans and 722 children with Child in Need plans. The total number of open children's social care cases has fallen to 1818, in January it was 1840, up from 1778 in October & 1686 in July. 34 children have been adopted since April 2016, and 18 children are placed in adoptive placements.

Across the financial year 2016/17, 3,780 local children and young people have been open to Children's Social Care (10% of the whole 0-19 year old population), of which 2,145 children (57% of all those worked with) were successfully de-escalated and closed to Children's Social Care during the year. Domestic violence, mental health, substance misuse and alcohol abuse, often in combination, remain the key drivers for new work for Children's Social Workers.

REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY (RAA) UPDATE

The department's Head of Service for Permanence has been appointed Head of Service for the Regional Adoption Agency and will lead the regional consortium which comprises of Caritas Care, Adoption Matters, Bury Council, Bolton Council, Rochdale Council, Tameside Council, Oldham Council and Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council. A Regional Adoption Agency update will be shared with the Council's Executive Board in June.

ADOLESCENT SUPPORT UNIT IS 'OUTSTANDING'

Following a recent Ofsted full social care inspection, the Inspector judged the Adolescent Support Unit as outstanding in all areas. In report states that *"Without a doubt, the interventions of this service have been successful in enabling young people to continue to live with their parents and have prevented a vast majority of them from becoming looked after."*

When speaking with Inspectors, the young people praised the work of the service commenting that the unit was a safe, caring and nurturing place to be. One young person said, *'I really like the staff and I enjoy coming here. I feel safe and the staff have helped me to be more positive about myself. I'd give this place ten out of ten, and I wouldn't change a thing.'*

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY – 8TH MARCH

The Children's Centre network played an active role in the celebration of this year's International Women's Day. Activities included supporting women to take care of their mental health, wellbeing and safety with breastfeeding celebrations, breast cancer screening and personal safety talks. The children and their parents and carers took part in an 'important women in my life' creative play session and enjoyed afternoon tea.

Similarly, Parents In Partnership (PIP) joined forces with the Apple Trees Disability Hub to provide a wealth of information on the local support services available for mothers and female carers in the borough. Mini-makeovers were on offer including nail painting, henna painting, threading, and head and hand massage. The event was a timely opportunity for families who have recently signed up to the Disability Links Information Services to visit Apple Trees and meet the staff who may support their child.

INVESTING IN CHILDREN UPDATE

In Blackburn with Darwen, 21 council and commissioned services have achieved the Investing in Children Membership Award in recognition of good practice and active inclusion and dialogue with children and young people to bring about change. Since the last Council Forum report the following services have gained accreditation: Independent Reviewing Officers; Fostering Service; Children in Our Care and Leaving Care.

2017 is the 21st anniversary of the Investing in Children organisation and to celebrate and champion this work, a North West event is being held in Blackburn at Livesey All Age Centre on Saturday 20th May.

EARLY HELP & EARLY INTERVENTION UPDATE

The Children's Centre network is proactively promoting the take up of the 30 hours per week free childcare with local businesses to attract working parents of 3 and 4 year olds. The scheme is being rolled out in September 2017 and from April the Early Years and Early Help service will be holding information workshops for early years education providers to help prepare for the delivery of the offer. It is expected that 343 children in Blackburn with Darwen will be eligible to access the offer between the Autumn 2017 and Spring 2018 terms.

Capital grant funding has been secured to create additional places capacity to support the 30 hour offer. Projects at Audley Childrens Centre, Little Harwood Children's Centre, Longshaw Nursery & Childcare Centre and Stepping Stones Nursery will be complete by November 2017.

HEALTHY CHILD PROGRAMME 0-19 SERVICE

A number of services have joined together under the team name 'Healthy Child Programme' and transferred into the Council's Early Help service this month (April). The new contract brings together a range of health and wellbeing services for children and young people to provide seamless and timely support for local parents, carers and families, based on the national Healthy Child Programme best evidence guidance of what works.

The programme sees the Council and Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust working alongside partners including East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust and the Families Health and Wellbeing Consortia to deliver services including health visiting, school nursing, specialist infant feeding and other third sector services. Team members will be based at four of the boroughs Children's Centres: Little Harwood; Audley; Darwen and Livesey.