

**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES  
COUNCILLOR MAUREEN BATESON**

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING  
DIRECTOR: LINDA CLEGG  
DATE: 5<sup>th</sup> October 2017**

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

The number of cases open to Children's Social Care has stabilised over the past 9 months to 1,606, with the support provided by Skylakes proving invaluable through that period. The number of Children in Care is 376 and has remained at this level over the past 6 months which is 30 higher than the equivalent period 12 months ago. The most pronounced rise over the past year has been in the number of children subject to Child Protection plans, which currently stands at 316, but has been as high as 370 during the late Spring. Over 500 children are being supported by Early Help services, with half of the lead professionals co-ordinating support for children and families being drawn from school staff.

**OFSTED SINGLE INSPECTION FRAMEWORK**

Children's Services are in the midst of their Ofsted inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers under the Single Inspection Framework (SIF). We are currently in the second week of a 4 week inspection; the first week focused on the 'front door' of Children's Social Care and this week, with Ofsted inspectors off-site but in regular contact, senior managers have been auditing 22 cases (selected by Ofsted) and producing a written report. The next two weeks will focus on core field work activity, with 6 inspectors tracking cases, talking to the involved practitioners, meeting key people (including partners) and talking to our children, young people and families. The inspection will conclude on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> October, findings will be embargoed until the report is published on Ofsted's website which takes place within 6 weeks of the inspection end date.

**FREE 30 HOUR CHILDCARE OFFER**

In July 2017, the service launched a campaign to increase awareness of the free 30 hour childcare offer. This has included a 3 week bus stop campaign at 20 bus stops across the borough, advertising on the digital advertising screen, banners at Children's Centres, social media activity and staff awareness through payslips and intranet updates. Additionally the team has attended a Jobcentre Plus parents' event to present and display information in relation to the offer. Plans are underway to send out postcards inviting parents to check their eligibility on the childcare choices website which will be sent out termly to children eligible to start the following term.

As of 6th September, 667 parents have been issued with a valid 30 hour eligibility code and of these, 446 (67%) have been submitted to the Local Authority for validation. 67 providers attended training sessions to enable them to validate the eligibility codes presented and further sessions are planned.

**EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION UPDATE**

The Skylakes commission to reduce social worker caseloads has come to a successful end and the department is building on this work by taking early intervention to prevent escalation into statutory services through a number of new approaches. These include the Complex Case Hub Multi-agency Pilot to work with families where there is evidence of high risk, high harm domestic abuse, parental emotional wellbeing issues, parental substance and alcohol misuse. Additionally the Family Group Conference work is being extended with 7 additional practitioners to work intensively with families on the cusp of social care to prevent entry. A new team of 6 Social Work Team Support Officers have also been recruited to support the workload of Social Workers and a review of the work of Troubled Families is underway.

## **SUMMER PACKED LUNCHES SUCCESS**

Across the summer holiday period over 17,000 packed lunches were provided to all children and families across the borough via a charity project Kingdom Outreach. This was supported by volunteers from across the local authority, businesses and community. Children's centres were used as distribution points with a range of family activities running alongside. Any food left at the end of lunch was redistributed to other services supporting families in need.

The offer was well received by children and parents with families feeding back that the project made a difference to their finances over the summer. Volunteers also reported a positive impact on them as it allowed them to give back to the community. There were unanticipated benefits from the work to the service as 10 new children centre volunteers were recruited and 14 families signed up to undertake a parenting programme.

## **CELEBRATION OF ACHIEVEMENT**

The Children in our Care Celebration of Achievement Award Ceremony is an annual event which provides an opportunity to meet together to celebrate the achievements of our children and young people. This year's event will take place on the 25<sup>th</sup> October at King Georges Hall. Children and young people in care and care leavers who attend have been nominated for awards by their carers, schools and Children's Services and Education staff. Categories are academic achievement and progress, attendance, behaviour, sport, music, the arts and making a positive contribution. In addition there will be a number of special awards for those who have particularly excelled in these areas.

## **ADOLESCENT STRATEGY**

On Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> September Dez Homes Director of 'Research in Practice led a masterclass 'Adolescence - Working with Risk and Resilience.'

The event was held at Witton City Learning Centre and attended by more than 60 professionals including senior managers from across all sectors and agencies. The feedback from this event has been overwhelmingly positive - and demonstrates a real commitment and enthusiasm to the development of more effective evidence based ways of working with adolescents in Blackburn with Darwen and also to working together to develop a multi-agency adolescent strategy.

This work is being taken forward by Imran Akuji Head of Service Community, Youth & Governance.

## **HEALTH VISITOR/ INTEGRATION**

NHS health visiting, school nursing and their skill mixed teams are now co-located within Little Harwood, Audley, Darwen and Livesey Children's Centres to work alongside colleagues from Children's Services and the Early Years and Early Help team.

The impact of this move means that front line service delivery for under-fives now takes place in children's centres, alongside children centre activities, rather than in GP surgeries or health clinics. This provides professionals with the opportunity for dynamic conversations with families in the one setting.

Children centre staff now work alongside Health Visitors to deliver family health drop ins and previously two health staff were involved. The integrated approach will ensure better utilisation of skills and expertise and avoid duplication. The next focus for integration will be the support offered to pregnant teenagers and parents.