

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

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: LINDA CLEGG
DATE: 22nd March 2018**

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

Recent regional analysis and national publicity has pointed to increasing demand pressures on children's services. The North West region and the North generally has seen rising numbers of children in care over the past 12 months, especially children and young people in older age groups with very complex social and behavioural issues. Blackburn with Darwen has moved towards the regional norm with a marked rise in the number of children in care and the number placed in the most costly residential placements.

The number of cases open to Children's Social Care has risen through the autumn and winter and currently stands at 1669. The number of Children in Care is 385: 20 higher than the equivalent period 12 months ago. There has been a fall in the number of children subject to child protection plans – down to 274 having been as high as 370 during the late Spring 2017. Over 500 children are being supported by Early Help services, 18 children have been adopted since April 2017 and 24 children are currently placed in adoptive placements.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY ACTIVITIES

To celebrate International Women's Day on 8th March, the Children's Services Disability Service, Appletrees Hub and Parents in Partnership hosted a pamper event at Appletrees offering treatments to mothers and female carers including henna painting, threading, makeup, massage, nail painting and hairstyling. Local agencies including Refresh, the WISH centre, Carers Service and MIND joined in with the celebrations and promoted the range services they offer to encourage participation.

Across the Children's Centre network, mums, grandmothers and female carers enjoyed spending time with their babies and children through interactive craft and play sessions with an emphasis on celebrating how important they are to each other. The day was also an opportunity to share a wealth of information on topics such as Positive Mind courses, flexible childcare options, advice on how to get back into work and healthy weight.

FOSTER CARERS THANK YOU

A number of retiring and long serving foster carers have been recognised for their dedication to the children and young people that they have fostered over many years. I presented certificates and flowers to the following retiring foster carers at a ceremony at the Enterprise Centre on 20th March: Audrey and Fred Wearing who fostered over 100 children over a 50 year period; Arlene and Barry Pickup who made a difference to the lives of 76 children over 36 years; Valda and Tony Creech who supported 24 children over 16 years; Margaret and John Bromage who fostered 17 children over 13 years and Sandra and Bill Murray who cared for 15 children over 14 years.

Additionally four foster carer families were recognised for their 10 year long service award and I presented £50 Mall vouchers to Christine Henderson, Kay and Nigel Margerison, Paula and Michael Chambers and Beverley Barber.

Thank you to all these carers for the loving care and support shown to 311 Blackburn with Darwen babies, children and young people.

GOOD NEIGHBOUR AWARDS 2018

It was fantastic to see two supporters of Children's Services receive Good Neighbour Awards in February. Kat Zaman picked up an award for the Summer Lunchbox campaign which provided over 17,000 free packed lunches to all children and families across the borough via the charity project Kingdom Outreach. Another deserving winner was Phil Boulding who set up the Secret Santa not for profit organisation which attracted donations and raised enough money to provide 700 new Christmas gift bundles to children and young people in need across the borough. Congratulations to both very worthy winners!

INVESTING IN CHILDREN ACCREDITATION SUCCESS

The Engage service and the WISH Centre are both celebrating having retained their Investing in Children Membership accreditation for another year. The Award recognises active inclusion and dialogue with children and young people to bring about change. For both applications the young people were interviewed about how they felt about the services they received before the decision to award was made. The evaluation report for Engage concluded that *"this dedicated team of people provide a vital service to young people in a way that respects their human rights to be involved in the decisions affecting their lives"*.

For the WISH centre this is a double celebration as the centre is this year marking its 30th anniversary of supporting men, women and children who are affected by domestic violence or domestic abuse. The celebrations will kick start with a launch event at Radio Lancashire on International Women's Day and include an exhibition to highlight their 30 year journey.

Both Engage and WISH help to stem the growing pressures on Childrens Services and in recent months a number of additional new programmes have been introduced to also provide early help for families. These are the Caring Dads Programme which provides opportunities for fathers in the borough to make positive changes in their relationship with their children and the mother of their children, and the Recurrent Care Proceedings programme which offers support to parents post care proceedings to prevent similar situations from recurring.

DISABILITY INFORMATION DAY

The 9th annual Blackburn with Darwen Disability Information Day took place at Ewood Park on 15th March to raise awareness of the range of services, organisations, groups and leisure opportunities available to children and young people and adults with disabilities in the borough, and their families and carers. More than 60 organisations were invited to take part and showcase what they have to offer. This year the event took place in term time to attract more parents and carers following feedback from the previous year.

OFSTED INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES UPDATE

The Children's Services post inspection action plan has been submitted to Ofsted in line with their inspection framework and will continue to be monitored by Ofsted. Progress against the action plan will be overseen by the Children's Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Corporate Parenting Specialist Advisory Group.

FOSTERING RECRUITMENT RADIO CAMPAIGNS

The Fostering Service has secured free air time on a new radio station based in the Ribble Valley, 'Ribble FM'. The station is planning a show on fostering and a Blackburn with Darwen carer and a social worker will talk about the positive impact that fostering with the council has had on the children and young people supported. The service has also partnered with radio station 2BR to promote the Fostering Service during Foster Care Fortnight in May to raise the profile of fostering.