

EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION



REPORT OF: Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education

LEAD OFFICERS: Director of Children's Services & Education

DATE: Thursday, 9 July 2020

PORTFOLIO(S) AFFECTED: Children, Young People and Education

WARD/S AFFECTED: (All Wards);

KEY DECISION: N

SUBJECT:

Report of the Ofsted Focused Visit 19-20 February 2020

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report sets out the findings of our last inspection by Ofsted as part of the Inspection of Local Authorities Children's Services (ILACS) framework. The short inspection was led by Inspector – Paula Thompson Jones, who was supported by Inspector – Kathryn Grindrod. The Focused Visit was announced three working days before the fieldwork of the inspection took place. The Lead Inspector required a broad range of information to be shared within one working day of the notification, and also asked for a range of audit activity to be submitted within two working days of the notification. The theme of our inspection was – Children in our care – with a specific focus on children who have recently become looked after.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

Executive Members are asked to note the contents of this report and to agree to the actions taken by the Service to ensure that we continue to meet the needs of children and families who require a social work service.

3. BACKGROUND

The primary key findings from the focused visit and our headline in terms of good practice was that – where risks are evident action is taken to protect our children in BwD.

Others include:

Decisions are timely and appropriate and children are placed in placements which meet their needs.

When care proceedings are initiated work begins to achieve early permanency and within review processes, permanence options are discussed.

Our legal gateway panel which was created in July 2019 offers a more consistent approach when decisions have to be made to intervene with legal advice and potential care proceedings.

Where there are risks to unborn babies assessments are timely and effective. Their future needs are risk assessed in order to protect.

The vast majority of children are placed with their brothers and sisters and have good contact plans in place.

Connected persons (extended family members or others with a meaningful relationship with a child) are assessed well and supported to care for the children they are assessed to care for. A specific team was created to undertake such assessments in the summer of 2018 and is working well.

Social workers know their children well and this also included information from third parties such as school/health representatives.

Social workers are doing more direct work with the children they hold than has previously been evidenced with good examples of wishes and feelings work.

Family group conferences are used well, both for support to plans and in identifying potential carers – such conferences are recorded well. Family group conferences are also used well to support extended family/carers – an example of a grandmother caring for her 5 grandchildren was given.

There is evidence of management oversight and evidence of Independent Reviewing Officers overseeing work. Regular supervision is in place.

Staff feel support by their managers and by senior leaders – a senior manager presence was reported by social workers.

Our Children's Advice and Duty Service (CADS) – which was 3 months into implementation at the time of the focused visit was acknowledged as a strategy to address caseloads.

Training for staff is in place which is effective and well received by staff.

Leaders understand the weaknesses within the service and strategies are in place to support. As a result of our sustained activity Social Work caseloads have reduced from an average of 21 to 18 for Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (newly qualified social workers) and from 24 to 22 for experienced Social Workers. This reduction has taken place since the time of the Focused Visit.

We have developed a social work retention strategy to ensure that we provide opportunities for Social Work staff who are committed to working within Blackburn with Darwen to have access to a clear career structure with investment in their continuous professional development. This will be launched at the end of July 2020.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

Two key primary areas for improvement:

Where children are at risk of neglect they can remain at home for too long – we wait for a catalyst before children come into our care.

Action: - The link between poverty and neglect is complex. Not all children who live in poverty experience neglect however children living in families with insufficient resources to meet basic needs may be more vulnerable to experiencing neglect.

A task and finish group through the Children's Partnership Board is supporting a multi-agency approach to this issue.

A neglect strategic action plan to address what Children's Services and partners can do to work together in this area is being updated and about to be shared.

Children subject to social work intervention under the category of neglect are being individually tracked by service leads so ensure we understand our cohort well and where the offer to our children is consistent and at the correct level.

A multi-agency audit is taking place with a focus on neglect in our Practice Week on the 6th July to inform what further action we need to take to improve the quality of our help and protection to children who are living in neglectful families.

Caseloads are too high and too complex, particularly for those social workers in their first year of practice

Action: The implementation of CADS, at the 26 week review since implementation, indicates that our referral level at the front door has reduced by 30%. This is part of our overall strategy to ensure that the right children receive the right level of support at the right time and is supporting a reduction in caseloads. The number of open cases within children's social care has reduced by approximately 400 compared to 12 months ago.

We aspire to every social worker having a realistic caseload – 15 for a newly qualified social worker in their first year of practice – 22 for those fully qualified. Work is ongoing with HR and finance and within our own resources to ensure that we are actively working towards achieving this figure being the average.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

None

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There is a need to ensure that Children's Services manage the budget within the Portfolio to ensure that Social Workers are recruited and retained in Blackburn with Darwen. This is to make sure that children and young people and their families receive a consistent and high quality service.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

To ensure that we have an effective social work recruitment and retention strategy.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision.

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision.

10. CONSULTATIONS

None

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

CONTACT OFFICER:	Janette Clarke, Ailsa Smith, , janette.clark@blackburn.gov.uk, ailsa.smith@blackburn.gov.uk
DATE:	01 July 2020
BACKGROUND PAPER:	