

PEOPLE: A GOOD QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL OUR RESIDENTS

Children's Social Care

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

Our current figures as regards Children's Social Care statistics are as follows:

Child in Need	255
Child Protection	165
Children in our Care	383

KEY PRIORITIES

Our key priorities since the last update has been to work on ensuring we reach out to our partners, third sector providers and members of the public, including parents and relatives to ensure that as a statutory body we are made aware of children in need of our intervention in the categories above. Our staff have maintained a business as usual approach to their roles during the pandemic and are now more free to interact on a face to face basis with their children and families.

- There remains a clear focus on our statutory services and our duty to assess, plan and intervene for all children subject to child in need plans, child protection plans and in our role as Corporate Parents. Our risk assessment tool which did focus on gradings of Red, Amber and Green (RAG rating) are now being relaxed, but with a Covid summary being recorded on children's files to ensure our obligations and duties to assess and support during this unique period are noted. Some of our older teenagers have enjoyed using social media and their smart phones to stay in touch with their social workers and social workers have fed back that this communication has sometimes brought about better communication and engagement. This practice for some young people will be here to stay and any aspects of what has worked well during Covid are being captured and will remain as good practice.
- You will note that our children looked after numbers have increased since July – up from 373 to 383. The impact of neglect is felt more significantly in larger sibling groups where parents can be overwhelmed and where their own life experiences and early childhood traumas have contributed to a lack of ability to safely parent. The increase relates to large sibling groups who have needed to come into care.
- During the week commencing 21/06/2021 we participated in a peer review led by the Local Government Authority (LGA) and the final report of their findings has been shared with us. The theme and focus of their review was the impact of childhood neglect and their summary of key messages sum up their overall findings as follows:
- "Blackburn with Darwen is clear that 'neglect is everybody's business'. Frontline staff speak passionately about supporting children and families underpinned by their own support from managers and leaders with a sense of travelling on a journey together despite months of high rates of pandemic infection and restrictions in the area. Courageous leadership invited the peer review, with a focus on neglect, at a time when the impact of the pandemic, increased poverty, isolation, and well-being concerns are not yet able to be fully understood. This reflects the BwD spirit, that despite significant challenges, they want to be 'the best they can be'."
- There are some recommendations to be taken away to enhance our practice, which include building on our quality assurance framework to better understand and evidence impact of services on outcomes for children and families; To continue to modernise our performance management information systems to provide real time data to support oversight of cases and

timely decisions; To continue the innovative approach to recruitment and retention of social workers.

As stated in the previous report, the summer did prove to be a testing time for us all in terms of the complexity of cases, the requirement to intervene for some children at a higher level, but overall less children are open within children's social care safeguarding teams and there is a drive to ensure the right children sit within the service at the right level and for the right length of time.

Our early help offer is strong and the step-up step-down process with clear evidence of shared thresholds and working together does ensure our children receive the support at the right level. This is then reflected within the safeguarding teams where our partnerships are equally strong with the police, health and education in particular. The Children's Advice and Duty (CADS) model is offering those professional conversations at the front door for all who call with a qualified experienced social worker which sifts out the progression of work to where it should sit. This is supporting us in ensuring that children and families get the right level of support from Early Help or Children's Social Care.

Corporate Parenting

Our Corporate Parenting Strategy has been endorsed by our Corporate Parenting Executive Board on the 6 September 2021. The strategy sets out our Pledges to our cared for children and care leavers. There will be training for all elected members on being challenging Corporate Parents over the coming municipal year.

ADOLESCENT SERVICES

YOUNG PEOPLES SERVICES

SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS & DISABILITIES (SEND) INCLUSION

Holiday Activity & Food Program (HAF)

The Send Inclusion Project delivered a successful summer holiday provision for children and young people with SEND aged between 5-19 years old. They were able to participate in a range of activities including centre based crafts, games and sensory activities as well as other games, biking, water sports and bush craft. This project offered around 75 young people a holiday provision each week, providing them with valuable social opportunity and the chance to take part in new activities.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Commissioned Group

The ASD session is delivering to 8 young people who are on the Autistic Spectrum. The children are settling well and developing positive routines with the staff who support them. They are able to choose from a range of activities including sensory activities, baking, sand and water play and construction toys as well as walks and activities outside. Each young person has an individual plan, working towards different goals, particularly promoting independence and developing new skills.

PARTICIPATION

Participation Strategy

Young people from across all Voice groups and Youth forums have co-designed the Participation Strategy 2021/2024, children and young people have now approved the draft version. There has been professional input from across Children's Services and from partners in the Strategic Youth Alliance

Well-being Champions

Young people were nominated by the Strategic Youth Alliance (SYA) and East Lancashire Child & Adolescent Services (ELCAS) forum to be trained as well-being champions. The young people

attended a 2 day residential where they completed a safe talk training programme regarding suicide prevention. The young people will be taking part in future training in October to become mental health peer support champions. They have co-designed the course with the Project Lead. This project arose as a result of the Youth MP's presenting the impact that Covid has had on children and young people's mental health in BwD to the Children's Partnership Board.

Youth Forum

Deputy Youth MP Muhammed Babu has been nominated for the One Voice young person of the year award in recognition of his commitment and dedication in ensuring young people's views and issues are heard and acted upon - in particularly during the Covid pandemic. Muhammed has been filmed having his vaccination to promote the take up with 15/16 year olds and has proved an effective advocate for vaccinations and testing.

TARGETED YOUTH SUPPORT

Holiday Activity & Food Program (HAF)

Targeted Youth Services (TYS) delivered a successful HAF programme over the summer period. Children and young people were given the opportunity to engage in all day activities at the Anderton Centre, Weekend trips and visits and a range of activity projects including bushcraft, music and creative arts, watersports, cooking and arts and crafts. Children and young people who find it difficult to attend in group work sessions were offered a similar experience in a one to one environment with their case worker.

Covid Detached Project

The Ministry of Housing Communities Local Government (MHCLG) funded Covid detached project ran into the summer holidays and continued to deliver 15 detached sessions per week. Each detached team was armed with the latest Covid information and actively promoted testing and vaccinations in those eligible. Staff also shared information on summer opportunities for Children and young People to be signposted directly to local provision as it reopened.

Fun Days

Utilising some of the funding from the Covid Detached Project Young People's Services (YPS) led on delivering summer fun days across the borough – supported by SYA partners. Over the summer period YPS led on 10 fun days over the weekends and mid-week. Fun days were delivered in the following areas:

Blackburn Town Centre, Darwen Town Centre, Witton Park, Roman Road Energy Zone, Daisyfield, Little Harwood, Shadsworth and Audley.

SEEDS – Adolescent Support Unit

The SEEDS service has supported numerous families within the borough with the offer of the holiday activity programme over the summer months. This has enabled the young people accessing the service to gain an ASDAN qualification, get time out of the house, and access new opportunities. The feedback received so far has been wholly positive from our young people and their families.

Our young people have shared their thoughts and ideas to enhance our outdoor areas and this has seen the service invest in those ideas with the creativity of the young people at the forefront of the planning. Young people and families accessing the service have continued to share extremely positive feedback about the support they receive, and the team and management are extremely proud of the positive outcomes achieved working with young people and their families.

Youth Justice Service

The Youth Justice Service continues to deliver prevention services. As well as their well-established practice of supporting young people in the borough who have displayed some degree of harmful or inappropriate sexualised behaviour, they also continue to support the delivery of the Pause 4 Thought programme to 10 – 14 year olds considered to be at risk of offending, and the 'Stay Safe'

events held in 'hotspot' areas of Blackburn and Darwen to identify vulnerable young people and provide a night time presence, alongside partner agencies, to disrupt potential anti-social behaviour. A development to the prevention offer of the YJS is the recent recruitment of a Prevention Officer, a role introduced to work alongside and complement existing preventative services, with a specific focus for supporting Looked After Children at risk of entering the criminal justice system as well as developing a presence in schools.

Engage Service

The development of our neighbourhood mapping work is helping to inform an understanding of contextual risks to young people in respect of the places and spaces where they spend time.

Transitional safeguarding has progressed and Engage are now working with several young people aged over 18, whilst developing referral pathways and making links with other services able to support young people into adulthood.

We have made use of technology to develop our training offer and since the pandemic started, have delivered training to over 400 attendees from partner agencies to increase awareness of exploitation.

EDUCATION

Schools Return

September has seen a real positive start to the academic year. All schools returned with less restrictions in place, schools no longer have to operate in bubbles and can offer much more extra-curricular activities which are being welcomed by our children and young people.

Under government guidance schools no longer have to track and trace and this is now the responsibility of the National Test and Trace system. A contingency framework for schools and settings was issued by DfE in August 2021.

The contingency framework describes the principles of managing local outbreaks of Coronavirus (COVID-19) (including responding to variants of concern) in education and childcare settings, covering:

- the types of measures that settings should be prepared for
- who can recommend these measures and where
- when measures should be lifted
- how decisions are made Local authorities, Directors of Public Health (DsPH) and PHE Health Protection Teams (HPTs) can recommend measures described here in individual education and childcare settings as part of their outbreak management responsibilities. Where there is a need to address more widespread issues across an area, ministers will take decisions on an area-by-area basis.

The Education response team continues to support all our schools and settings throughout the borough. The council have added agreed an additional layer of support to schools. To complement the National track and trace system – schools are advising parents of children who have mixed closely with a positive case to take their child for a PCR test. Schools have responded well to this system. To close of play Tuesday 14th September – there were 165 confirmed positive cases in our schools. Average school attendance for the borough sits at 93%.

Since the announcement of vaccinations for 12 – 15 year olds. The Education department has facilitated a meeting with Dianne Draper (Screening and Immunisation Lead - Lancashire and South Cumbria & Cheshire and Mersey - Consultant in Healthcare Public Health), High school Headteachers, Special school and Alternative Provision Headteachers, Chief Executives of Multi Academy trusts, Diocesan leads and colleagues from the council to discuss the rollout of the programme. This was received well by schools and the programme should begin in the coming weeks.

COUNCIL: DELIVERED BY A STRONG AND RESILIENT COUNCIL