

**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION
COUNCILLOR JULIE GUNN
PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: JAYNE IVORY
DATE: 24th March 2022**

Schools and Education

The Education response team have continued to support all our schools and settings throughout the borough this term. From Monday 7th March, we will be scaling back the Education response team and this has been communicated to all Headteachers. The change reflects the reduction in cases being reported by schools, the phasing out of testing at the end of the month, and the updated operational guidance for schools. It recognises that schools are confident in dealing with the day to day challenges as we all begin to live with Covid-19. The Education response team will continue to support schools and settings albeit in a reduced way.

Current attendance as of week beginning 21st February 2022 remain higher than national average for all pupils, pupils with and EHCP and generally in line with national average for children with a social worker.

Ofsted inspections continue this term Newfield's report has been published, moving from Outstanding to Requires Improvement. St Stephen's CE Blackburn, Darwen St Peter's CE and Sacred Heart have all been inspected and we await final reports.

Steve Munby, Visiting Professor at University College London, Centre for Educational Leadership, has been commissioned to Chair the School Improvement Board. Initially he will conduct a review of the Future of School Improvement in Blackburn with Darwen and the future role of the School Improvement Partnership Board. This review is timely as Government will publish its Education White Paper this year and the Local Authority School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant will be halved from April 2022 and will end completely in April 2023. After several years of functioning and in the light of a new and emerging national agenda, the Board agreed that now is a good time to step back and review the future of the Blackburn with Darwen School Improvement Partnership. Steve will conduct one-to-one interviews with the key people in Blackburn with Darwen, eg Director of Children's Services, Executive Member for Children's Services, CEOs of Multi-Academy Trusts, Regional Schools Commissioner, SIG head teachers, Deputy Director for Education and Schools, Leaders of Teaching School Hubs. He will then produce a report which summarises the issues and suggests some ways forward. The report will be discussed at a special meeting of the School Improvement Partnership Board on 30th June with a view to launching the new way of working, if appropriate, in the autumn of 2022. Days for conducting the review: 17th and 18th May.

Blackburn with Darwen with support from the boroughs Secondary School sector have made 2239 offers of Year 7 places for September 2022:

Number of children in offered their first preference secondary school	1733
Number of children in offered their second preference secondary school	263
Number of children in offered their third preference secondary school	97
Number of children in offered a no preference secondary school	146

Blackburn with Darwen has agreed to take part in a 'pilot' of the Annual Conversation with OFSTED. This entails rather than a single meeting, a number of single conversations taking place for:
Early Years
Schools
SEND and Children in our care
Post 16.

We have hosted three of these meetings this term. They have been productive meetings of sharing the excellent work taking place in BwD, whilst also making the challenges we face clear to OFSTED.

SEND

Late November Blackburn with Darwen council and CCG took part in a pilot 'methodology testing' with OFSTED and CQC.

The purpose of the Methodology Testing was to:

- Test out some new ways to gather evidence about the way children and young people with SEND are supported
- Provide the inspectorates with valuable information about how well possible new approaches work in practice and help them to identify where further improvements or thinking is needed.
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As this was not an inspection there is no formal report to share. However OFSTED and CQC gave some feedback regarding positive practices within BwD. The team also indicated two areas for the local area to look at in further depth. The process lasted three weeks with all meetings taking place virtually. The methodology testing provided an insight into future local area inspections and gave opportunities for the council and CCG to test our Self Evaluation.

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

As reported on 2nd March 2022, the number of Children in our Care is 388. CP Plans is 101 and CIN 268

Our recent data that our re-referral rate remains categorised as lower than the regional and national average. This indicates that from the front door Children's Advice and Duty Service the right children are progressing as referrals for assessment which then determine the most appropriate planning to safeguard or support the children within our borough. We have introduced bi weekly multi agency reviews of contacts and referrals through the front door to increase our scrutiny of these and to support continuous improvements.

Children in Need plans have remained steady over the past 6 months – 268 currently compared to 250 at the end of July 2021. Our children subject to child protection plans has decreased from 152 to 101 over the same period.

Since July 2021, there has been an increase in the number of children becoming looked after for some of the reasons accounted for above. Our current cohort of children subject to interim care orders pending final outcomes from court proceedings is 84. This compares to 63 at the end of July 2021.

From November 2021 we have been piloting Systemic Teams which focus on children and families having one social worker/team manager from the front door up until a plan of permanence is achieved. For many this will mean step down or closure but for the minority this will mean retaining children through care proceedings to determine final legal permanence when, for some, the care plan may be one of adoption or them remaining looked after more longer term. This model is in its infancy, but appears to be embedded well, with weekly review of impact taking place. This way of working is also upskilling our workforce and offering a broader experience in child care social work for our staff. Evaluation of this pilot will be fully explored in six months' time.

Corporate Parenting

As previously stated there has been an increase in the numbers of Cared for Children in the borough which has been a proportionate response to the circumstances of risk that children and young people are experiencing in their families. We have an embedded and timely response to ensure where possible children and young people remain with their extended family members during this period with support from the Permanence Team. This in turn means that children and young people are likely to minimise change in terms of education and health professionals that know them.

The theme around embedding the Corporate Parenting Strategy continues with the Strategy on a Page being aligned with the training for members and partner agencies, to assist with easy reference and remain mindful of our pledges.

ADOLESCENT SERVICES

Engage Service

The team are planning to deliver a briefing to all Members in the New Year following a positive piece of work around neighbourhood mapping, which is helping to inform an understanding of contextual risks to young people in respect of the places and spaces where they spend time. The mapping exercise is providing valuable intel in supporting a multi-agency approach to disruption and prevention. Engage are planning several events as part of County Lines Intensification Week, which runs from 7th March, to increase understanding of child criminal exploitation and how this impacts young people within Blackburn with Darwen. This includes awareness raising to communities, parents and carers, Police, supported housing and youth groups, and several workshops for staff across Children's Services. Awareness raising events have also been arranged for young people, and the team is working in partnership with a local gym to provide a programme of support for groups of young people vulnerable to exploitation. We continue to develop our joint working with other members of Adolescent Services, with TYS now completing detached work to areas where Engage believe young people may face contextual risks.

The SEEDS – Adolescent Support Unit

The SEEDS service has continued to support vulnerable families and young people over the Christmas period. Holiday and family time can be a difficult period for families to manage, hence there has been a collective response to ensure families and children are supported effectively.

Adolescent services have supported the SEEDS and Lytham Road Children's Homes to manage staffing capacity impacted by sickness, demand and Covid. The Deputy Manager and the Principal Adolescent Support Team Worker are working towards Systemic training in both 'Systemic Social Work Practice' and 'Leadership and Management training'. Even though they have yet to complete this training we are now starting to embed aspects of systemic practice at The SEEDS.

Recently the SEEDs have provided emergency support to a number of young people. The Seeds provide an ongoing preventative service, providing support to young people and their families to help to avoid a placement breakdown. The service continues to contribute hugely within a multi-agency approach to provide practical help and support for young people and families who are struggling in times of crisis.

Youth Justice Service

The Youth Justice Service (YJS) are currently developing a joint post to sit alongside the Engage team, initially as a fixed term contract. This would improve links between services to support and intervene with young people identified as possibly becoming involved in criminality that may be underpinned by exploitative influences, in the hope of preventing them from being criminalised. Plans for the post have been put forward to Workforce Management for approval.

The YJS are also developing conversations with Lancashire and South Cumbria Foundation Trust (LSCFT) to obtain Speech and Language support for young people open to the YJS, an issue widely acknowledged as prevalent for both children and adults within the criminal justice system. It is hoped that acquiring this service will improve children and young people's journey, to better understand and navigate their way through the system, and equip them to avoid returning through reoffending. Headlines for the YJS are that since the New Year, the service has worked closely with the custodial estate to support three young people transition into adult services. Two of those have turned 18 years of age and moved into the adult custodial estate, however the YJS has retained some

responsibility and involvement with them both to ensure the transition is as smooth and effective as possible and that they are supported through the process. The other individual was released from custody around their 18th birthday and transferred to the Probation Service upon doing so. A similar approach was taken with the YJS remaining involved following their 18th birthday and release from custody with the individual and their new Probation Officer, to support this transition.

In February the YJS delivered a training and briefing session to the borough's Foster Carers. The focus of the session was to educate and inform the carers of the function and work of the YJS for when the two worlds, on occasion, overlap. Emphasis was placed on the 'child first, offender second' model and approach taken to the YJS' work, to build resilience and self-esteem for those young people that come into service. Approaches and strategies were explored to how carers can contribute to avoiding the unnecessary criminalisation of young people within the care system and support the young people they care for to help provide the best possible start to life, without the stigmatisation that a criminal record can often bring.

Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) Supervision Pilot

The Designated Safeguarding Lead Supervision pilot continues to be established in the selected primary and secondary schools. The midway feedback is overwhelmingly positive with schools identifying the impact in terms of increased DSL confidence and timely early help interventions for children and young people. This has also been evidenced in the notable reduction in NFA (No Further Action) contacts to CADS. Discussions are ongoing to determine whether this is something that can be maintained once the funding from What Works for Children's Social Care comes to an end in July 2022.

Leaving Care Service

The Leaving Care Service is available to care experienced young people from the age of 16 to 25 years to support and guide young people with their transition to adulthood. The Leaving Care Service works closely with care experienced young people to ensure their voice is heard and they are central to the planning of their future. The Leaving Care service support with a wide range of services to support young people with their education, training, employment, accommodation, financial support alongside supporting and promoting their health and well-being. We are currently developing the Leaving Care Service to ensure all young people aged 16 – 25 years are able to be supported in the best way possible. We are looking forward to the developments of the service and having our care experienced young people participate to help shape the offer and service delivery moving forward.

Targeted Youth Support (TYS)

Current overall caseload of **105** young people across the prevention and intervention teams. We have **21** young people subject to a child protection plan, **42** subject to child in need plan, **40** part of CAF and **2** young people at universal level provision. We continue to provide individually tailored support packages to all TYS young people offering positive activity on a 1:1 and group work basis as a means to address issues identified in the wider plan.

YPS - SEND Inclusion Project

Kaleidoscope youth centre has recently undertaken renovation which includes a brand new sensory room, this will have a positive impact on the children and young people who access our projects.

Additional staff have now been contracted to the term time offer to enable an increase in children and young people who access our weekly provision to meet demand.

BwD Youth Forum

The Youth Elections took place between 24th Jan – 4th Feb with over 5,000 votes received. The newly elected Youth MP is Muhammed Bapu with Deputies Hasti Jahanghiri and Isabelle Crawford.

Their main campaign issues over the next two years will focus on Mental Health, Child Poverty and Environmental Issues.

The third Strategic Youth Alliance (SYA) Forum took place in February which led to YPS producing a video promoting vaccinations for 12 – 15 year olds. The national Make Your Mark (MYM) referendum took place in February with 7 key issues that affect children and young people nationally. The top 3 for young people in BwD are:

- 1) Jobs, Money, Homes and Opportunities
- 2) Education and Learning
- 3) Health and Wellbeing

Voice Groups

Both the Junior and Senior voice groups met with the Ofsted Inspectors last month at Kaleidoscope Youth Centre providing insight into their projects.

Youth Ambassador Programme

TYS has successfully delivered 2 cohorts of the Youth Ambassador programme over the winter period. Within this delivery we've seen 20 young people take part in 2 activity led team building residentials followed by 4 weekly sessions based around developing knowledge and understanding of religion, culture and diversity in the locality.

YPS Detached Project

Following on from the successes of the COVID Detached project prior to the winter break YPS have led (with the support of commissioned services - BRCT and BYZ) on 3 weekly detached sessions targeting hot spot ASB areas in the locality and following up on information provided by partners in Engage and the Police Force. The aim of the project is to reduce ASB, prevent any potential criminal or sexual exploitation and provide safe, alternative provision through signposting to universal and targeted provision to our third sector partners.

YIF Funding Bid

In February YPS secured £37k worth of funding through the Children In Need Youth Improvement Fund which will see wholesale changes to 3 of our centres offering new, accessible tech and emotional wellbeing improvement opportunities through the development of a wellbeing suite at our Knott Street centre.

Duke of Edinburgh (DofE)

After an extensive period of non-delivery due to COVID restrictions YPS has re-started its DofE Open Award. We currently have a group of 15 registered young people working towards the Bronze and Silver Awards. Young people attend on a twice monthly basis and are developing plans for a Spring expedition.