

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION

COUNCILLOR JULIE GUNN

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
CHIEF OFFICERS: Strategic Director
of Children's & Education (DCS)
Thursday, 28 July 2022**

PEOPLE: A good quality of life for all our residents;

HELP AND PROTECTION

The front door of Children's Services continue to work with the CADS model, ensuring that there is an experienced Social Worker responding to calls for advice or where there is a concern for a child. We have established well attended fortnightly multi-agency meetings to review data and the quality of our multi-agency work.

We continue to monitor the vacancy rate of our social workers and have updated our recruitment strategy which includes a recruitment event on 16th July 2022 for Social Work vacancies at a variety of job grades. The event provides the opportunity to interview on the morning for vacant roles or to come and hear about what Blackburn with Darwen has to offer as a place to work and interview at a later date. Our Young People will support with meeting attendees and interviewing.

The OFSTED improvement plan has been agreed. Some actions have already been completed, including strategy discussion progress and training and audit activity has evidenced improved practice in this area. We continue to work to ensure the improvement is embedded and this will be evidenced through strategies that have been put in place. This includes an escalation process where there is non-compliance attendance at strategy meetings, fortnightly meetings between agencies to audit a selection of strategy discussions, and a quarterly strategic board to provide oversight and scrutiny. There is also a newly developed routine audit tool to capture performance, quality and impact of practice.

Sessions with the workforce on the improvement plan have taken place to ensure that all staff are fully aware of their role in our improvement journey, with a particular focus on our Team Managers and Deputy Team Managers.

PRACTICE WEEK

Practice Week in May was a thematic review which considered strategy meetings and section 47 enquiries. It involved working alongside partner agencies to test out the impact of multi-agency work already completed. This was undertaken through audit activity, learning circles and reflective panel discussions to identify areas of good practice, what progress and impact have we made and further learning opportunities.

Impact made so far with cases considered in Practice Week:

- Strategy discussions are now held in a timely manner.
- 100% of single agency action, if appropriate, is only undertaken following multi agency planning at the strategy discussion
- Key partners are prioritising attendance at strategy meetings, and where this doesn't happen there is an escalation process in place to alert the relevant senior managers
- Stronger return of audits activity that is currently at 80%
- An average of 75% of strategy discussions are now graded as 'good' or outstanding,
- Case recording for initial strategy meetings has significantly improved
- Practice week analysis and full findings paper to be provided in July 2022

PARTICIPATION, VOICE & IMPACT

Young Peoples Interview Panels

- Over the last few months Young Peoples Services (YPS) has supported several young people's interview panels for various roles within Children's Services – ranging from Head of Service to frontline practitioners.
- The young people have been fully involved in all aspects of the process which has given young people increased self-confidence and improved analytical, communication and organisational skills.

Young Inspectors Programme

- The Young Inspectors programme allows trained young people to inspect the services they access and make recommendations for improvement.
- The BwD Young Inspectors pilot began in June 2022 and young people have co-designed their inspection framework and have tested this with the Targeted Youth Support service. The young people have interviewed managers, staff and service users and will be providing feedback including an award category based on their findings. There is a review process after 6 months to evaluate progress. Two more pilots (one Council service and one VCFS agency) will take place prior to the full roll out.

CIOC/Youth Forums/Youth MP

- The Leaving Care Forum raised a query regarding the BwD Be-Active card following feedback from other care leavers that it was not easy to renew their cards or even apply for one. A meeting with the Leisure team has led to improved accessibility for children in care with the age criteria extended from 8 – 18 years to 0 – 25 years. A redesigned Be-Active leisure card application form has been shared across Children's Services and with Foster Carers.
- Youth MP Mohammed Bapu and the Youth Forum have Food Poverty as a leading local campaign and have contributed locally via the Child Poverty Steering Group. The Youth Forum has decided to make Child Poverty the key theme of this year's Takeover Challenge in November. Schools will be invited to take part in workshops to raise awareness and develop local strategies of support.
- The Well Being Champions Programme (co-produced with young people) is now 12 months in development. In this period, the Youth Forum has undertaken significant consultative work and presented their findings to the Children's Partnership Board which led to BwD Public Health funding a 12 month project to train 25 young people in peer supported mental health. This has proved so successful that a further funding package has been secured to train more young people.

PERMANENCE

We have had some interest in terms of enquiries following our Fostering Fortnight in May 2022. The theme for the fortnight was "Community." An example of some of the events is; The Foster Carer Association was rewarded for its considerable efforts in hosting an event on Feniscowles Field with an excellent community turn out, which we hope will raise the profile of fostering. An increase in foster placements will keep our cared for children and young people close to us in the borough.

We have seen an increase in the numbers of children coming into care. This is a national picture and the family demographics mirror the BwD community by large families requiring intervention of an Interim Care Order. This has led to an increase in the numbers of Family and

Friends assessments taking place. The well embedded process is coping with the demand which means that if children and young people are unable to return to their parents they are able to live with people until maturity who know them well.

SCHOOLS & EDUCATION

SEND

The Department for Education has recently published a Green Paper for SEND ‘Right support, Right place, Right time’. Children’s Services led a ‘stocktake’ for the local area, involving Health, Social Care in Adults and Childrens, along with colleagues in Education (0–25). As part of the stocktake, the department invited the Council for Disabled Children to lead the local area response to the Green Paper – this was a very successful event.

OFSTED and the CQC has also recently released a consultation for a new inspection framework for Local Area inspections. The draft framework is very much based on the Methodology Testing our local area conducted with OFSTED and the CQC earlier in this academic year. The local area is attending webinars hosted by OFSTED in preparation for the final version of the new Local area OFSED and CQC framework for inspecting SEND. Our SEND Strategic Board continues to drive our SEND improvements across the local area.

Schools White Paper

The DfE has recently produced the Schools White paper – ‘Opportunity for all strong schools with great teachers for your child’. There are four chapters within this White Paper;

- An excellent teacher for every child
- Delivering high standards of curriculum, behaviour and attendance
- Targeted support for every child who needs it
- A fairer school system

These proposals could have significant impact on future partnership working in Blackburn with Darwen. In particular the White Paper and Schools Bill in relation to trusts state that:

- All schools are expected to be in trusts of at least 10 schools or 7.5k pupils by 2030
- The Local Authority can set up its own trusts under certain circumstances
- Once all schools join trusts, as is proposed, the Local Authority will no longer have a statutory role for school improvement
- A new regulator will be set up to ensure that trusts keep to a new set of standards

In the light of a new and emerging national agenda, it was an appropriate time to step back and review the future. With a new independent chair of the Blackburn with Darwen School Improvement Partnership Board, it made sense to request the role commence with a strategic review and some recommendations on the way forward for the School Improvement Board in BwD.

The Blackburn with Darwen School Improvement Partnership has existed for several years. Its purpose has been to bring key stakeholders together in order to make strategic decisions about school improvement in Blackburn with Darwen, to review progress within the School Improvement Groups and to jointly hold to account those responsible for school improvement within the borough.

The Local Authority School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant was halved from April 2022 and will end completely in April 2023.

MULTI-AGENCY STOCKTAKES

Children's Services has hosted three multi-agency 'stocktakes' during May and June to reflect on key areas of practice and generate discussion to drive through transformation and improvement activity. In addition to the SEND Stocktake which is highlighted earlier in this report, the department co-ordinated the following:

- The **Youth Justice Stocktake** brought together the statutory Youth Justice Board, Youth Justice Service team, Lancashire Constabulary and key partners to explore areas for development to improve outcomes for our young people, confirm collective priorities for the service for 2022/23 and reflect on values. The stocktake generated rich discussions and action planning, which focused on strengthened governance to cascade decision making and strategic direction to all tiers within the partnership and secondly for individual practitioners and teams to have a greater understanding of roles and processes across teams to forge stronger working relationships. Overall the event was extremely positive with valuable input from partners to further develop the service and improve outcomes for young people. Following the stocktake, the service's strategic plan has been developed, incorporating feedback and contributions from participants, and has been submitted to the National Youth Justice Board (YJB).

The **Leaving Care Stocktake** similarly focused on the importance of a partnership approach to improve experiences and outcomes for young people and young adults. Lively discussion topics were held between the Leaving Care Service, Health, Housing and a number of commissioned services which consequently has led to a deeper understanding of how partners can improve how they work together to provide a strong and equitable offer for Care Leavers. Care experienced young people attended the event as delegates and delivered an impactful presentation. New ideas were generated about how the partnership can do more to support Care Leavers to achieve their aspirations, and also how the priorities within the Corporate Parenting Strategy can be embedded across individual organisations to drive improvement forward. A follow up Stocktake is planned for the Autumn reaching out to more staff to get involved and share their voices.