

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, 6 October 2022

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

Help and Protection

The summer months have seen steady numbers of referrals coming into CADS. It is positive that there are parents and carers reaching out for advice, help and support. Our data tells us that parents are the third highest contact source for CADS. Our Early Help offer continues to grow with higher number of CAFS being offered within Primary Schools.

Positively our Front Door CADS service is fully staffed to meet the level of demand. We continue to review our weekly data to ensure the quality and timeliness of service delivery.

We held our Social Work recruitment event in July which was a success. We are attracting newly qualified Social Workers into the service. We are however faced with the challenge of experienced Social Workers leaving the service to take up higher paid agency jobs. This issue is not isolated to Blackburn with Darwen and is a national issue and we have a rolling recruitment process in place. We have attracted applications from external experienced Team Manger and Service Lead level, which is positive. We are working closely with Human Resources colleagues to understand the factors relating to those leaving the Local Authority and also those you are staying with Blackburn with Darwen (BwD).

Cared for Children

The same number of children are being placed within our care as pre-pandemic which reflects the national picture. Also in line with the national trend is an increase in the number of sibling groups being placed.

Whilst there is an increase we need to be mindful of the impact of this on Social Work caseloads and their capacity to complete direct work with children and their families. We are completing focused pieces of work with our new Children in Our Care Team Managers to look at discharge of Care Orders at Home. We need to assure ourselves that children and young people are subject to the right plan and not subject to statutory interventions unnecessarily and support Social Work caseloads. It is worth noting that positively there have not been any care orders at home made in the past 12 months, with the Senior Manager oversight if there is a suggestion.

The focus on children and young people in out of borough homes continues to promote the right plan for children and young people to remain near their home. This not only supports them to remain better contact with their families, social workers, education and familiar health care provision but we are also in a position to work towards care plans of fostering and a return home when safe to do so.

Young Peoples Services (YPS), Engage and Youth Justice Service (YJS)

In collaboration with the local neighbourhood Police Teams, Community Safety, Blackburn Rovers Community Trust and colleagues from education, the YJS are supporting the production of an informative and interactive programme to be delivered in schools, entitled 'In Your Corner'. The programme content will be varied to deliver key messages in relation to the dangers and consequences of sexting, social media, bullying, knife crime, drug and alcohol awareness and information relating to services children and young people can access for additional support. The programme is being designed in such a way that schools can request for the programme to be delivered, which will initially be co-delivered with the school for them to be able to subsequently deliver it independently of the professional services listed, thus reaching a broader audience.

'Zoe Lodrick specialist trauma training' for those working with children who have experienced or are at risk of exploitation and/or sexual harm took place in July 2022 hosted by Engage. Around 100 multi-agency participants attended and feedback has been positive.

A multi-agency learning meeting including professionals from Engage, Children's Social Care, Police, Parents Against Child Exploitation (PACE) and YJS has taken place centring on a specific case study to inform our responses and processes to supporting children who are victims of Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) who may become involved in the criminal justice system.

Education and Vulnerable Learners

This summer saw the first set of data collections since 2019 due to the cancellation of the 2020 and 2021 assessments during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Education team is working on datasets and want to ensure the 2021/22 data is used appropriately. Caution is advised when comparing to national and local authority or to results of previous years.

As schools and setting return September 2022, OFSTED has announced, the transitional arrangements have now been removed from the updated handbooks. In their place, a new grade descriptor has been added to the quality of education judgement, acknowledging that settings are no longer facing emergency measures and are taking longer-term approaches to return pupils and learners to the curriculum they always intended.

Area wide improvement focus - Improving Speech, Language and Communication (Early Years Strategy)

- The schools White Paper states: We know that high-quality early education, particularly early language skills, can greatly improve a child's attainment throughout primary school. We also know that almost half of the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers at key stage 4 has emerged by age five.
- In BWD schools and settings have focused on making improvements in developing young children's communication and language skills.
- BWD school readiness data shows this is the biggest challenge our children face when starting school and the key area to develop in all settings in order give them the best start to their education.

The strategy

- A Borough wide initiative to improve outcomes for all children in all settings – Private, Voluntary & Independent (PVI's), Nurseries and Early Years settings.

Based on 2 Phases:

Phase 1 – Audit Tool

Phase 2 – Targeted Support

- A full system lead approach to addressing early Speech, Language & Communication (SPLC) - the difference between lack of experiences / learning / development and/or SEND needs.
- Increased focus on 'school readiness' and children having the necessary experiences and learning opportunities to achieve a Good Level of Development measure by the end of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), (National aim of 90%+)
- Already secured full support of School Improvement Board and EYFS leaders groups.
- Underpinned by our transition work this year and provided learning that we will take into next year.

Participation

Children in Our Care Voice

- To maximise opportunities - Voice forums have taken place throughout the day during summer - focusing on activities such as water sports, bowling, Anderton Centre outdoor education day trips and a visit to the zoo. Numbers of participants had dropped prior to summer but the summer programme and promotion via the Foster Carer Association (FCA), the Children in Our Care (CIOC) fun day and across Children's Services will boost attendances in the autumn term.
- Six members of the leaving care forum participated in a residential at Kentmere over the summer, alongside members of the youth forum and the Kids Next Door (Autism Spectrum Disorder) group. The residential was a reward residential for all the young people's commitment and input into consultation/scrutiny activity over the previous months
- The CIOC fun day was led and organised by The Leaving Care forum on Saturday 20th August from 11am – 3pm. Over 100 young people and their families attended alongside BwDBC CEO Denise Park, Cllr Julie Gunn, The Mayor (Cllr Suleman Khonat) and a range of professionals and councillors.
- Five leaving care young people completed Total Respect Training (2 day training programme) alongside adults/professionals from Youth Justice Service, Leaving Care Team, YPS and the FCA as well as Cllr Julie Gunn.

Total Respect is a national training resource delivered by Care experienced trainers. It supports the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The five young people, with support from the adult professionals, are tasked with delivering awareness training for staff from across the council regarding the experience of being in care.

Universal Participation

- Youth MP Muhammed Bapu attended the Member of Youth Parliament (MYP) Annual conference in Hull. He presented two motions that made the manifesto campaign which are Child Food Poverty and Mental Health. This was a fantastic achievement for both himself and the children and young people he represents. These issues will be part of the UK Youth Parliament key campaigns over the next 2 years.
- A recruitment and training day was completed on 22nd August by twelve young people from across the borough's Strategic Youth Alliance (SYA) youth organisations – significantly increasing the number of trained young people available for future Inspections.
- The Young Inspectors project has completed its pilot with BwDBC Targeted Youth Support Service (part of YPS) and a report has been produced. The young people have completed a post pilot evaluation review and will test the programme further with another pilot within Adolescent Services in September 22.
- Youth MP – Muhammed Bapu has been selected by the Youth Parliament steering group member for the North West to be one of two MYP's from the region to represent the North West Department for Digital Culture Media Sport (DCMS) focus group consultation, discussing a possible merger between the UK Youth Parliament and the Youth Policy Development group hosted by DCMS. The proposed merger will allow for more resources and opportunities for MYP to collaborate directly with government ministers.
- The BwD Youth Forum will be hosting the annual Take Over Challenge in November and this year's theme, selected by young people, is Child Poverty. The young people have invited three guest speakers to facilitate workshops on Mental Health, Food Poverty and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's). The event will be led by the Youth Forum, with support from Young Peoples Services. All secondary schools and colleges have been invited to attend.
- Five young people from the Youth Forum will be attending the North West Net Zero event at Salford University in October and will be challenging senior decision makers with solutions!

SEND Inclusion Participation

- The Council for Disabled Children are attending Kaleidoscope Youth Centre in November to consult with service users regarding the government's new SEND White Paper.

Blackburn with Darwen Summer 2022 - Holiday and Food (HAF) Programme

Backed by a nationwide investment of around £200 million, the HAF programme ran across all local authority areas during the Summer school holidays, as well as Easter. The local programme, which was launched in April, is targeted at those who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals.

This summer over 3,000 children and young people in Blackburn with Darwen have benefited from a bonanza of free summer activities. We reached 84% of free school meal families and 245 were SEND. In addition the children centres delivered a range of

creative and fun play session. In total 517 families attended activities, of those families, 32 were referred for additional support for toileting and speech and language.

A total of 15 partners including charities and community groups delivered the programme in Blackburn with Darwen:

- Children's centre network
- YPS
- Seeds
- Adolescent Support Unit
- Blackburn Youth Zone
- IMO Charity,
- Youth Action
- Newground
- FACE
- Sportscool
- Blackburn Rovers Community Trust
- One Voice Blackburn
- Junction 4 Skatepark
- The Billy Project (Community Interest company (CIC))
- Rainbow Youth

The provision included free nutritional meals being distributed across the borough:

- Delivery Partners - 41,000
- Children centres - 14,352 (this included a hot meal or grab bag packed lunch)
- YPS - 375
- Children with disabilities - 182

The holiday clubs involved helping young people get involved with new and enriching activities from sport to music, dance, drama, art, cooking and gardening. With the glorious weather many local partners chose to include outdoor activities. IMO Charity's activities included outdoor science experiments as well as a special, 'I'm a scientist, get me out of here' project.

Blackburn Youth Zone's 'Slip and Slide' water activity was a hit with young people. Youth Action's provision included an army assault course as well as self-defence and martial arts sessions.

The Council's Young People's services visited the Space Centre in Preston and went orienteering in Witton Park. Blackburn Rover's Community Trust had a series of dance, drama and sports activities throughout the summer holidays.

Parents have praised the range of services provided by the HAF programme this summer.

"My son has really enjoyed the summer holiday club," said Summayah. "Every single day was a different day with lots of exciting activities and he was always excited to go next day. The holiday club provided fruit, healthy snacks, sandwiches and hot meals throughout the week. The staff provided a safe and welcoming service for our family."

"The holiday club helped my son by improving his willingness to get involved with activity"

"I had some family issues and just recently moved to Blackburn, and everything was new for me, he attends the school the group was held at which helped him feel comfortable. It was a wonderful club"

"Many thanks for all your staff who got good and strong customer service skills, you are providing good skills for our children"

Social media content from providers based on feedback so far has been excellent, the SEND only clubs have been highly praised too for their mixture of activity, such as a petting zoo activity / Inflatables / sensory sessions etc.

Part of our delivery it to ensure that all the activity is quality assured during the holidays. Spring North lead this and we were joined by a Department for Education (DfE) representative, who visited 5 clubs with Spring North. The DfE reported *'It was really clear that you have developed a strong HAF programme at the centres that we visited in BwD. I was really impressed by the variety of activities on offer, the passion of the staff and the overarching happiness of the children in attendance. It was also great to hear that provision was on offer for older children too'*

Surveys for exact delivery from partners and experience level from families have been sent out.

The Seeds HAF Project

Summer 2022 – a 4 week Outdoor Activity Programme at the Anderton Centre, Chorley with 120 meals provided as part of the programme. Young people were collected in the morning and lunch provided at the Anderton Centre before taking part in a range of outdoor activities (canoeing, sailing, paddle boarding, crate stacking, bush craft, archery, tree climbing, leap of faith).

Air fryers and slow cookers were also provided to 27 families along with groceries to provide 300 meals. Advice regarding menu planning and recipes offered to families.

Sample of Feedback

"The slow cooker was absolutely amazing and a wonderful thing to receive on its own. To receive the bag of food as well is overwhelming. I can't believe how much food there was."

A young person was collected from home for his session at the Anderton Centre, with lunch provided before an afternoon of outdoor activities. When collected for his session the young person had spent the previous night in a police cell due to conflict at home. The following day, the young person's mother stated - "He had a great night last night after he had been with you. Thank you. Whatever you did with him it was great...he's been talking about it all night".

Young person in foster care who initially did not want to attend the outdoor activity programme: "...at first I didn't want to come cos I'd rather be with my mates but now I'm like, do one, I'm going to water sports....."