

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

COUNCILLOR JULIE GUNN

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
CHIEF OFFICERS: Acting Director
Children's Services and Education
Thursday, 26 January 2023

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

Children's Social Care

- **Help & Protection**

In the run up to Christmas there has been(charitable generosity with the giving of Christmas gifts for those families in need. Family Support Workers and Social Workers co-ordinated the delivery of these gifts ensuring that children did not go without at Christmas. In response to fuel poverty and the cost of living crisis, Early Help practitioners have been proactive in identifying sources and accessing energy support for families in need. The need for this was particularly acute during the very cold spell in December and this will continue to be invaluable for the remainder of the winter.

Staff engagement sessions were held with teams in Early Help and Safeguarding and areas we can improve on to support our workforce have been identified. It came across strongly that our workforce enjoy working for the department and have positive experience as employees.

There has been a focus on the recruitment of Social Workers within our Safeguarding Teams. With the support of our HR colleagues there is a new recruitment drive incorporating our TRACK values, to attract Social Workers in what is a very competitive market. Along with renewed job adverts there is a recruitment event planned for Saturday 21st January.

- **Placements and Permanence**

There have been a number of events that have taken place over recent months within the Fostering Service for the carers and children and young people - all organised via the Foster Carer Association (FCA) and the Fostering Team.

A Halloween Party was enjoyed by looked after children and young people and their foster carer families on the 27th of October at Kaleidoscope Youth Centre. This was followed by a Christmas Fair on 10th December with stalls, tombola and raffles, all of which raised money to subsidise Christmas Panto tickets for 2023. The Christmas Panto this year was Cinderella which families enjoyed on the 3rd December.

Monthly Fostering recruitment open evenings have continued to take place at Blackburn Leisure Centres hosted by the Marketing and Recruitment Officer and a Fostering Social Worker. In addition, there has been a collaboration with Blackpool Borough Council to undertake a recruitment campaign for specialist carers for Pace Remand Beds / Complex Needs carers and Parent and Child Placements. This event led to one prospective carer moving forward with an application. There is ongoing advertising at Blackburn Rovers, Burnley Football Club and the local Ice Skating Rink and the Hawks. A re-launch of communications for recruitment will take place in the New Year with a closer working relationship with the corporate Communications Team.

- **Children with Disability (CWD)**

The Children with a Disability Team have been joint working with Newfield School and Children and Families (CAF) Leads to support parents of younger children in a preventative approach. The aim going forward is to deliver specific parenting support and programmes to parents in school aimed at supporting behaviour that parents find challenging. This is in addition to

responding to common concerns of parents such as diet, sensory seeking behaviours and sleep, and to follow up individually with any parent who would like support but are still at the lower level of the continuum of need.

The CWD team is attending the monthly coffee morning at Newfield to talk directly to parents about the role of children's social care and try and change the narrative around social care assessment. The aim of this is to be able to support parents at a much earlier stage to improve outcomes for children and families and also reduce the likelihood of families approaching the team when at crisis point, or with children needing to be cared for away from home.

The CWD Team Manager has formed new links with the Service Manager and Team Manager from Kirklees Council, which has enabled the service to begin to consider how they can support those children and young people with a package of outreach more effectively. This is in line with consultation with parents and young people. We envisage a new model would also allow more capacity in the team for preventative approaches.

The team are introducing the concepts of 'brilliant at the basics'. This means offering Family Group Conferencing to all families coming for assessment, ensuring that we gather the views of absent parents, ensuring visits and meetings are held in a timely manner and in a way that is accessible for children with complex needs. We are focussing on the importance of play, stimulation and education as we have identified that these are common areas of concern that we identify through assessments. This will help shift the narrative from a medical model approach to a social model approach.

We are looking to bring the Occupational Therapy contract in house which should mean a better service for families in terms of the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). We plan to refresh our processes around this and ensure that our communication with families is clear around the processes and decision making involved.

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

- **Youth Justice Services (YJS)**

During October 2022 the Youth Justice Service was inspected by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP), incorporating several weeks of preparation prior to a full week of fieldwork where four inspectors were on site in Duke Street. All aspects of the service were scrutinised with specific focus given to governance and leadership arrangements and the service provided to children and young people that enter the service via the Police and Courts, as well as the experience of those that go on to enter the secure youth estate.

Although formally embargoed until 16th January 2023 when the final report is published, we have received notification that the YJS has been graded 'Good'. Details contained within the draft report received highlights that there were several individual areas rated as 'Outstanding', including governance and leadership and staffing arrangements. Through the points scoring system used during the inspection process, it can be seen that the service was a matter of two points from being graded as 'Outstanding'.

As with any inspection process, there are recommendations for further development of the service. Several of these are already being implemented, however, they will be formally captured in an 'Improvement Plan' to be submitted to HMIP following the report being published.

- **Young Inspectors Programme**

Young Inspectors is a National Quality Assurance process that puts Young People at the heart of scrutinising and improving local services.

The Blackburn with Darwen Youth Forum have re shaped national guidance to better reflect the local area and have had two young leaders qualified nationally in the programme.

Blackburn with Darwen has developed a local training programme, recruited a pool of over 10 trained young inspectors and are now close to finalising the second pilot inspection with SEEDS. Young Peoples Services (Targeted Youth Support) has already been inspected, with the programme evaluated and tweaked as a result. Nightsafe will be inspected in the New Year, to ensure we test with Voluntary, Community & Faith Sector (VCFS) partners. The first full inspection is in the planning for the Youth Justice Service in late January.

- **SEEDS**

The SEEDS held an annual Christmas party on 19th December 2022 and 23 young people attended with their families and brother and sisters. Cllr Julie Gunn and the Jo Siddle, Acting Director of Children's Services attended the event and spoke with the young people and their families. All young people who attended the event received a Christmas gift and their brothers and sisters also received a gift.

The SEEDS currently has 21 young people accessing short breaks which is an increase from previous months.

- **Leaving Care**

The Leaving Care end of year party was held on 15th December and 30 young people attended in addition to the Council Leader Cllr Phil Riley, Cllr Julie Gunn. One young person provided the DJ entertainment for which got all our young people up dancing including young people from Apple House supported living. The young people all received a gift and had a wonderful buffet.

A total of 235 gifts for our young people in leaving care were donated, alongside monetary donations to support purchasing additional gifts, ensuring every care leaver has received a Christmas gift.

Education and Vulnerable learners

This term, Ofsted have been carrying out both graded (Section 8) and ungraded (Section 5) inspections in our local area using the updated Education Inspection Framework (EIF). Overall, the majority of all schools in Blackburn with Darwen are judged good or better with no schools judged as inadequate. As an Education Team we continue to support and challenge schools to help them secure the best possible outcomes for all children across our borough.

Update on our area wide improvement focus - Developing Speech, Language and Communication

At the beginning of September we launched a borough wide initiative linked to improving speech, language and communication outcomes for all children in all settings including; Private, Voluntary & Independent (PVI's), Nurseries and Early Years settings. The initiative is based on;

1. Carrying out audits in all provisions through a speech, language and communication scrutiny lens.
2. Each setting using a comprehensive speech, language and communication screening assessment toolkit that will provide borough wide data at three points across the year.

The key achievements of the initiative so far have been;

- There is a 100% take up from all schools, nurseries and children centres.
- Schools and settings have submitted baseline data and this will now be used to inform practice in the settings and across the borough.
- We are beginning to build up a strong evidence base of what strategies work best in improving children's language and vocabulary development in Blackburn with Darwen.

As an Education Department we have also refined and improved the monitoring of part-time timetables in schools, particularly for vulnerable pupils.

We ask all our schools (including Multi-Academy Trusts) to complete an electronic monthly part-time timetable return. The data is then collected, quality assured and scrutinised each month. School returns have improved since their introduction at the beginning of the year and all schools now return information. Through monitoring the use of part-time timetables we are able to ensure that children and young people have access to a broad and balanced curriculum alongside a full range of support services if needed, for example SEND support.

As a result of monitoring, the use of part-time timetables the following actions have been completed this term:

- More collaboration between schools and the SEND service resulting in the right support for children and young people at the right time.
- Greater sharing of data with the EY and SEND teachers
- A more joined-up approach across education teams with more effective data sharing with schools

- **Holiday Activities & Food Programme (HAF)**

Children's Centres

HAF Christmas delivery took place 19th-23rd December. There were lots of positive activities during the week including multi-sports, cinema trips, pantomime and lots of Christmas parties. The strength of our partnership working and the enthusiasm for HAF across the borough is a fantastic achievement.

Children centres were very busy taking orders for the lunches we provided for families who don't always want to access an activity. All eight children centres delivered activities and a free meal.

Blackburn Rovers Community Trust – this is the 3rd year that the Trust has supported our families in need. This year they provided 600 x £15 vouchers for Asda for families. These are all families who are on a CAF, Child in Need, Child Protection - and also all our Leaving Care young people receive a voucher.

Young Peoples Services (YPS)

YPS delivered two HAF programmes this Christmas. Targeted Youth Support delivered a programme which included a residential, trips to museums, activity centres, cinemas and bowling alleys and all participants received food and drinks. The programme engaged with the majority of the current cohort which is 110 children and young people.

The SEND Inclusion team delivered a programme for those children and young people identified as having a Special Educational Need and/or Disability (SEND). Working closely with the Disability Team – the most vulnerable children and young people and their families are offered a range of indoor activities supplemented with trips including to Smithhills Farm.

Free School Meals Eligibility

This month, the Chief Executive, Denise Park, received a letter from the Minister for Schools, The Rt Hon Nick Gibb, in response to the Motion agreed at the October Council Forum Meeting requesting the extension of Free School Meals eligibility for the benefit of families. The Minister confirmed that the government does not have any plans to extend universal provision but will continue to keep all free school meal eligibility under review, to ensure that these meals are supporting those who need them most. The National School Breakfast Programme has been extended until July 2024 to support up to 2500 schools in disadvantaged areas.