

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

COUNCILLOR JULIE GUNN

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
CHIEF OFFICERS:
Thursday, 23 March 2023

PEOPLE: Every child and young person to have opportunities to fulfil their potential;

Help & Protection

Workforce - Our recent recruitment event in January was successful in attracting external candidates. There were appointments made. In the main we are still attracting newly qualified Social Workers. There was very positive feedback around what was attractive about BwD with one attendee advising that our TRACK values was the main driver for them looking at BwD. We have also revised how we link in with our current students to make the process of securing them with us at an earlier stage. We have had agreement for Social Work apprenticeships to be broadened to an external offer alongside internal apprenticeships. This is extremely positive so we can grow our own and retain staff.

There is an increase in demand at the front door. This is not unusual for the post Christmas period. We have re-configured our Social Work teams to duty/ assessment and CP/court. This has been well received by the workforce, morale is good so from that perspective we are in a position to be able to cope with an increase in demand at this time. This is balanced, however, with caseloads still being higher than we want them to be. We continue to work with HR colleagues on recruiting to our vacancies, some of which are currently being covered by Agency Social Workers which comes with an increased cost.

Corporate Parenting and Permanence

Over the last quarter, the Leadership Structure has stabilised, with two new Service Leads appointed and commenced in post. One Service Lead for Children in our Care (CIOC) and Children with a Disability (CwD) and one Service Lead for Placements and Resources. In addition, in January 2023, an Interim Head of Service for Corporate Parenting and Permanence was appointed for six months or until a full Directorate Structure has taken place following the appointment of the Director of Children's and Education (DCS) role.

Children In Our Care (CIOC)

The Blackburn with Darwen Children In Our Care service has experienced significant changes in the last 12 months, this has included a number of changes in social workers and within the management team. It is however extremely positive that as of March 2023 there is a fully staffed team. This will be positive for our children and young people, as it will provide them with consistency and we know the importance of our social workers building positive and enduring relationships.

From January 2023, the team have implemented a learning and development programme, which aims to ensure that social workers are skilled in interacting with our children and young people, allowing them to fully understand their lived experience. This has included a key focus on ensuring the team are using appropriate direct work tools whilst carrying out key statutory duties such as home visits and Child and Family assessments.

The team continues to build positive relationship with key partners from health and education, with a further key focus of ensuring our children and young people have access to specialist support.

There has been an increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) who have been placed into our care via the North West Strategic Migration Partnership. The dedicated Team Manager to this area of work, has worked closely with this partnership and he has sought additional training and guidance when required to allow us to meet the specific needs of these vulnerable young people.

Children with Disabilities

There has been further positive changes within the Children with Disabilities Team, which includes the recruitment of a new Team Manager and two new social workers. The team has also recruited an Advanced Practitioner who can provide specialist oversight of the social care advice which informs our children's Education Health and Care Plan.

In response to feedback from parents and carers, the team have implemented new process, which reviews the packages of outreach support provided to our children with disabilities. Through consultation and agreement with our partners in education, the team are now utilising the EHCP review process to review these packages, which removes the need for these children to be open via the Child In Need process.

The service has now re-established the siblings group, this is a group with brings together the siblings of children with disabilities. This allows for peer support for these children whilst allowing them an opportunity to socialise outside of the home.

Placements

The Fostering Team has begun significant transformation planning, which is in line with the six pillars within the Stable Homes, Built on Love Implementation Strategy and Consultation published on the 2nd of February 2023. This strategy sets out a vision to rebalance children's social care away from costly crisis interventions, to more meaningful and effective early support. It seeks to address urgent issues facing children and families now, lays the foundations for system reform and sets the national direction for change. The current Transformation Plan ensures we are moving forward and driving the service to ensure we are fit for now and the future. The Plan includes 6 main areas which are:-

1. Digital Transformation Programme
2. Recruitment and Links with Communication Team
3. Retention of Foster Carers/Allowances
4. Commissioning and Contracts
5. Payments Panel/Governance
6. Workforce Development

The aim of the plan is to ensure the fostering service receives adequate investment and strategic oversight to meet the needs of the service with a focus on the above six areas. This development plan will aim to ensure that our children who are cared for are provided with placements that are local and mainly in house, with highly trained foster carers who receive appropriate support from the local authority. In addition, placements can provide long term, permanent care without delay and where the children and young people in these placements achieve the best possible outcomes and live life to their full potential.

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

Young People's Services

Strategic Youth Alliance (SYA) Forum

The Participation Team's youth voice activity continues to progress well with over 30 Young People (YP) now regularly attending the SYA Youth Forum (YP reps from each of the 11 SYA orgs). Chaired by the Youth MP (and deputies) this forum has supported the following over the last 3 months:

- BwD YIF application
- Supporting KOOTH roll out
- Work continues on issues such as period poverty, child poverty and EHWB

Youthforia

The Youth MP and Deputies have also attended this month's Youthforia which was hosted in BwD Council Chambers. Over 100 YP attended in what was the busiest Youthforia since the pandemic. Positive feedback from YP attending and Staff supporting.

Young Inspectors

The Young Inspectors programme has now completed 2 internal pilots (Targeted Youth Support and SEEDS) and has just commenced its final pilot via VCFS partner Nightsafe. When the evaluation/actions from this pilot is complete the programme will be launched and will commence with a full YI inspection of BwDBC Leaving Care and Youth Justice Services. It'll be interesting to see if our Young Inspectors agree with the National Youth Justice Inspectors – who found the Youth Justice Service Good with outstanding areas!

Other Participation highlights:

- Youth MP involved in DCMS consultation re; UK Youth Parliament
- Care experienced YP to deliver Total Respect training at the next CPSAG meeting at the end of March.
- SEND YP participated in the national Youth Voice Matters conference supported by the Council for Disabled Children and the National Children's Bureau.
- SEND YP have coproduced the BwD Local Offer webpage with support from the Council for Disabled Children.
- YP planning a Climate Summit for their Takeover Challenge in November with support from the Environment Agency.
- Active involvement with Children's Services recruitment, YP involved in the social worker recruitment day and a number of key positions over the last few weeks, including the DCS role.
- Residential planned for March for YP to participate in development workshops such as public speaking, campaigning and debating skills.
- YP to participate in the Youthforia Brathay residential in March 23 with 100 YP from across the NW.

Youth Justice

On the back of its 'Good' HMIP inspection, earlier this month the Youth Justice Service (YJS) finalised their Improvement Plan before submitting this to the inspectorate, which has since been acknowledged and approved. Many aspects of this are already complete, with the others being actioned. Within the YJS, the Turnaround Programme is now operational following receipt of funding from the Ministry of Justice up until April 2025. The programme aims to target and support children and young people on the periphery of the justice system, with referral pathways now established for the Police, Community Safety and Courts. A Coordinator for the programme is currently being recruited to support delivery for the duration of the funding. This complements the existing Prevention Officer role within the YJS who continues to extend the remit of his work, supporting a Community Safety initiative called 'In Your Corner' being delivered in schools and a

collaborative programme of resources between the YJS and Young People's Services with a small group of young people identified on the YPS caseload. The Prevention Officer continues to develop links with our schools to establish referral pathways, with St Thomas' and DACA now linked in and recent conversations with the School Effectiveness Officer to look further across the borough.

Engage

County line intensification week is taking place on the 27th February 2023 – Over the week there will be multi agency awareness raising events within the local community with a larger event being hosted at Blackburn Central High school on 3rd March.

The last county line intensification event took place in October 2022 where the multiagency team reached out to over 150 young people with over 17 key agencies supporting. It is hoped that we reach out even wider with the event in February 2023.

The SEEDS

SEEDS have continued to carry out their invaluable edge of care services for children, young people and their families. SEEDS was inspected by Ofsted on the 16th and 17th February 2023, we are awaiting the final report and grading. Young people came to meet with the inspector to share their overwhelmingly positive experience at the SEEDS.

Leaving Care

A PEER review is taking place with the Leaving Care team on 20th March 2023, the team will have a number of key lines of enquiry and will review practice within the service alongside the difference the service is having upon the care leavers.

Education and Vulnerable Learners

Pupils with SEND

Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) can affect a child or young person's ability to learn. A child with SEND can experience many challenges during their academic journey for example; behaviour and/or their ability to socialise, speech and language, cognitive function and understanding.

As an LA we are continuing to work closely with our schools to ensure that children get the right support, in the right place at the right time in line with the Government's Green Paper: SEND Review 2022.

As an LA we support schools in identifying children with SEND. Children and young people with SEND receive support at either:

- [SEN support](#) - support given in school, i.e. additional speech, language or communication support

Or through:

- an [Education, Health and Care \(EHC\) plan](#) - a plan for children and young people aged up to 25 who have more complex needs

The percentage of children who have identified SEND needs is rising both nationally and locally. Blackburn with Darwen are currently responsible for the education of over five thousand pupils with identified SEND needs. Therefore, in order to carry out statutory duties, we have a large SEND team who work with the different sectors providing both support and challenge. The work includes fostering understanding across the wider children's services department, upskilling and training staff and providing both statutory and non-statutory advice and guidance.

The team has recently expanded in order to provide support for children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. We now have a Lead Advisory Teacher, Advisory Teacher and two Specialist Support Practitioners who are deployed to work directly with children and settings. In addition, we have two SEND School Effectiveness Officers who are responsible for providing challenge and support to schools around inclusive and adaptive teaching and learning

practices. As part of this work, the team have established joint working practices with Public Health and Mental Health in Schools colleagues to pilot an Emotional Health and Wellbeing Audit and resources across ten schools. This is now being rolled out further to include all settings and provisions across the borough.

Suspensions/Exclusions

We have seen an increase in the number of pupils who have received fixed term suspensions and permanent exclusions in Blackburn with Darwen. Whilst this increase reflects the trajectory both regionally and nationally the numbers of pupils who receive a fixed period suspensions and/or who are excluded remains lower than the regional and national averages.

Schools submit information about suspensions and exclusions to the LA. This information is reviewed monthly and those schools with high numbers of suspensions/exclusions are contacted to discuss the reasons for this.

Information is shared with the relevant services areas/professionals if any Looked after Children or children with an EHCP (Education and Health Care Plan) are suspended/excluded and the relevant officers will make contact with that school to discuss the reasons for the suspension/exclusion, and ascertain what strategies or support needs to be put in place to facilitate a pupils prompt return to school and mitigate future suspensions/exclusions.

On receipt of a permanent exclusion notification and if the pupil resides in Blackburn with Darwen an immediate referral is made to St Thomas Centre, ensuring that a school place is made available by day 6 of any permanent exclusion.

The Local Authority attends all maintained permanent exclusion meetings and attends academy/free school permanent exclusion meetings at the request of parents and/or the school.

Bi-monthly complex case meetings are held to discuss individual cases and may include pupils who are regularly missing education due to suspensions.