

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

COUNCILLOR JULIE GUNN

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
CHIEF OFFICERS: Strategic Director
of Children & Education (DCS)
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Every child and young person to have opportunities to fulfil their potential

Help and Protection

CADS, Duty and Assessment and Safeguarding and Support

We are continuing to focus on recruitment to Social Work posts to achieve a skilled and stable workforce and reduce our reliance on agency staff. At this time across CADS (Child Advice and Duty Service), Duty and Assessment and Safeguarding and Support we have 13 agency social workers, (4 of whom are covering maternity leave). Our agency rate has reduced from 30% to 12% over the last 10 months, in comparison to other Local Authorities in the region who consistently have agency rates of 30% up to 50% of their workforce.

Following a successful JTAI (Joint Targeted Area Inspection) the service has developed and implemented key actions to address the recommendations received. Inspectors were very positive about our committed and hardworking workforce. As the inspection was a review of partnerships response to identification of initial need and risk, the department is working closely with relevant partners and external agencies to continue to improve outcomes for children.

We have recently had an external review of practice for children who are subject to Child in Need plans, the review team were impressed by our Social Workers who had told them that they were happy working for Blackburn with Darwen and feel supported by their managers.

SEEDS

Our HAF summer activity program once again proved to be a roaring success. It provided our young people with some fantastic opportunities that they would not normally have access to. We supported 18 young people to attend The Anderton Centre where they were able to participate in a range of adventurous activities. The program consisted of both land based and water based activities. Whilst some of these activities really pushed some of our young people out of their comfort zone, they adapted brilliantly and embraced every opportunity they were given.

The Seeds supported 24 families with weekly food boxes for the 4 week period which was greatly appreciated. The HAF was a resounding success thoroughly enjoyed by everyone that attended. We have received positive feedback directly from young people about their experiences.

Corporate Parenting and Permanence

Children with Disabilities

Our Disability Links Family Fun Day took place on the 6th August 2023, this was a fantastic event with over 200 people attending during the day. It was great to see our families coming together; children went out of their comfort zone in climbing the tower, encountering animals and being around lots of people. The feedback from our children and families was great to hear which was overwhelmingly positive.

AppleTrees Short Breaks

It has been a very busy summer holiday period at Appletrees, with staff proving extremely enthusiastic about supporting young people with outside activities so they enjoy new experiences. Every young person has been on an outing, this has included trips to Hothersall

Lodge where they experienced caving, rock climbing, zip-wiring and canoeing. Other trips have included Blackpool Zoo, Chester Zoo, Eureka, Sea Life centres and many trips to beaches and parks.

All our families have had at least one additional overnight stay to support them through the holidays and the service has continue to be flexible in our approach adjusting arrival/pick-up times for young people to support families working hours.

Within this period there has also been another excellent, Regulation 44 report which has spotlighted the activities over the summer.

Fostering

Our Recruitment activity continues to pick up pace, with two current initial enquiries taking place and three initial visits being completed. We have now approved seven households this year and are in the process of undertaking four new assessments that will hopefully progress to approval so we can place more of our children and young people in house. The assessments will be presented to panel through September, October and November. We have a KPI of approving 12 households for 2023 – 2024 and we are already hitting our target for the first half of the year.

We will always need foster carers on an ongoing basis due to foster carers retiring, but also accepting that children and young people who can't seek permanency within their own family, a kinship carer or adoption, will have a care plan of long term care with their foster carers. This then does not leave vacancies for any more children or young people to be placed with them.

As schools are going back and universities are taking a new influx, so the team will be looking at reminding those with "an empty nest", to consider fostering. There are new bus stop adverts going out embedding the new QR code. To add to this, the new Ice Hockey season is due to start at Blackburn Hawks and our recruitment and marketing lead has been working behind the scenes to have a new ticket option in place. Once this has been confirmed, we can share this with our foster carers so they can go to the home games for free as a family. It's a wonderful family event and they are child and family centred. GO HAWKS!!

DFG/OT Service

On the 1st of August, we brought the Occupational Health for social care and schools and the Disability Facilities Grant (DFG) Team in-house. The team will be embedded into the Children with a Disability Team which will provide a unique multi-disciplinary team of Social Workers, Child Support Officers, Occupational Therapists, a Therapy Assistant and a DFG Coordinator in collaboration with the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Teams. The team is in the early stages of development, working closely with our Digital Team to ensure seamless referral options and case management systems.

Leaving Care

The final new staff are due to join the team in the next two weeks bringing additional capacity into the team. Care experienced young people are meeting at Limes this month to create a video on what permanence means to them. A further update will be provided in the next council forum report.

The Service Lead recently contacted a number of young people to seek their views on the service, their understanding of the entitlement and their relationship with their PA, feedback received was really positive, see a couple of quotes below:

The service is "good", Julie is like an Aunty, I adore Julie we have a really good relationship. I love Julie (PA).

I know she is there for me no matter what, we have had a relationship for 4/5 years. She comes to see me we, message each other there is nothing else that I need.

Young People Services (YPS)

Youth Investment Fund:

As you will likely have seen we are now able to publicly celebrate successfully bidding for new youth infrastructure funding across the borough. The Local authority has secured £4.583m for council assets and over £8 million in new Youth Infrastructure across the borough alongside partners. The £4.583 council funding will support development of Darwen Youth Centre (£3.343m) and Audley & QP Centre (£1.038m).

In addition BYZ have secured significant funds to redevelop the Fusebox into an employability and wellbeing hub. Newground Together have also been successful and will develop a brand new Youth Hub in the heart of Shadsworth community.

The YIF boards have been established and Young People will be consulted again in the coming weeks on design/colour scheme ideas – which follows on from pre-application consultancy that has driven the overall design plan.

HAF

YPS has just completed its summer HAF programmes that offers food and activities to the TYS (Targeted Youth Support) and SEND cohorts. Highlights have included trips to Blackpool Pleasure Beach, Blackpool Zoo, Cinema, Bowling, Trips to the seaside, Blackburn Rovers matches and ground tours, and nature reserves plus a whole range of outdoor activities including water sports, mountain biking, climbing and archery.

YPs have also delivered a number of residential experiences too including Waterpark on Coniston for CIOC (Children in our Care) and SEND C&YP. Over 150 vulnerable individual children & YP have benefitted from the YPS offer with over 500 total attendances.

Youth Justice Service (YJS)

The YJS Turnaround Programme, designed to intervene early and prevent children and young people from becoming involved with the justice system, has established a partnership with the Young BwD Foundation to support delivery using key community organisations. This seeks to engage young people with one or more of the various services that come under the foundation's umbrella, with a view to increasing the support network available to children within their local communities and to build sustainable engagement for them beyond the ending of their YJS involvement.

In collaboration with the Police and Community Safety, the YJS has developed and launched the Youth Referral Panel, a forum for children under the age of 18 to be referred into when they have come to the attention of the Police for repeated incidents of anti-social behaviour. The panel provides a collective oversight on the needs of the child and refer on for specialist support and intervention. It is hoped that the aforementioned Turnaround Programme will be a valuable referral source for many of these children.

Education

Educational Outcomes – Key Stage 2

The DFE released individual Year 6 pupil level data to schools in July 2023 as well as national headline statistics for attainment of Year 6 pupils who took Key Stage 2 SATS assessments in summer 2023.

Caution is advised when considering any data for the academic year 2022/2023 as these pupils experienced considerable disruption to their learning during the pandemic, particularly at the end of Year 3 and in Year 4. Performance Measures Data will not be available to Local Authorities until schools have completed their data checking exercise in early September. When this data is released it is expected to be presented in a broadly similar way as pre-pandemic, for example, with comparison tables for schools, local authorities and multi-academy trusts.

Nationally, overall children's attainment in individual subjects increased in maths, writing and science compared to 2022. Attainment remained the same in Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling and fell in reading.

- In **reading**, 73% of pupils met the expected standard, down from 75% in 2022.
- In **maths**, 73% of pupils met the expected standard, up from 71% in 2022.
- In **writing**, 71% of pupils met the expected standard, up from 69% in 2022.
- In **grammar, punctuation and spelling**, 72% of pupils met the expected standard, unchanged from 2022.
- In **science**, 80% of pupils met the expected standard, up from 79% in 2022.
- **Attainment** in all of reading, writing and maths (combined) remained the same as in 2022.

Educational Outcomes – Key Stage 4

Grades for GCSEs this year were much closer to 2019 levels with attainment slightly above 2019 levels.

- 22.7% of GCSEs were graded 9-7, compared to 21.9% in 2019
- 70.5% were graded 9-4, compared to 69.9% in 2019.

Grades were higher during the pandemic, as in both 2020 and 2021 all public exams were cancelled and grades were awarded using different systems, known as Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs) and Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs). CAGs and TAGs grades were higher, on average, than those awarded in more typical years. Last year, to avoid a sudden sharp fall in grades, they were adjusted to a level between their peak in 2021 and the level in 2019, the year before the pandemic affected exams. In 2022 Blackburn with Darwen GCSE performance in English and Maths was stronger than in other subjects and early predictions suggest that this has continued. Regional and school level data is not expected to be published until the end of this year.

Ofsted Inspections

Routine inspections of schools are normally carried out by Ofsted as follows:

- A school judged outstanding or good will usually be inspected within the 4 academic years following its last inspection.
- A school judged requires improvement or inadequate will usually be inspected within two and a half years.

However, this hasn't been the case for schools over the last couple of years due to;

- A pause in inspections during the pandemic
- The government lifting the inspection exemption for outstanding schools; adding an additional 3,000 schools to the schedule, many of which had not been inspected for a decade or more
- The government requiring every school to be inspected at least once before August 2025

As a direct result, last academic year 2022-2023, Blackburn with Darwen had 19 of the 55 primary schools inspected by Ofsted under the Education Inspection Framework (EIF) and 6 high schools. Currently, 90% of our primary and secondary schools are judged either good or better with 15% judged as outstanding.