

# 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)  
Thursday, 25 January 2024**

**Every child and young person to have opportunities to fulfil their potential.**

## **New Children's Services & Education Priorities**

Following a period of consultation with the workforce, new priorities for the Children's Services & Education department have been agreed. These will guide our combined efforts towards a future in which children and young people in Blackburn with Darwen can grow up to have a happy and healthy life, experience success and overcome challenges:

1. **Stable homes built on love** - deliver a transformation programme to support the delivery of services in line with Working Together and community needs.
2. **Right support, right time, right person** - review and redesign our pathways to services to enable better aligned approach to service delivery.
3. **Effective transitions for all ages and needs** - support children in navigating changes effectively, setting them up for success in their educational and personal journeys.
4. **Raising aspirations and fulfil potential** - provide children and young people with the necessary resources, opportunities, and support to develop their skills, talents, and abilities.
5. **We are Systemic** - promote holistic and effective support for children and their families.
6. **Best start in life** - setting children on a path of healthy development and well-being.

## **Corporate Parenting Panel launched.**

In line with the council's commitment to providing looked after children with secure, nurturing, and positive experiences, we have taken the decision to revamp our corporate parenting governance arrangements to enhance their effectiveness. This both complements and is central to the wider Children's Social Care improvement journey ahead of the upcoming Ofsted ILACS (Inspecting local authority children's services) inspection.

Both the Corporate Parenting Specialist Advisory Group (CPSAG) and the Corporate Parenting Executive Board have now evolved into a more robust and streamlined entity: the new Corporate Parenting Panel. Its inaugural meeting took place on January 10, 2024, and this incorporated a training session conducted by the Local Government Association (LGA), adding both value and expertise. The Panel boasts a diverse membership of councillors, officers, and representatives from partner agencies, each well-equipped to make meaningful contributions to improving the lives of care experienced children and young people.

## **Youth Justice Service (YJS)**

The YJS has continued to get out and about into schools in the borough to deliver its prevention focused programme, 'In Your Corner', with the most recent round of delivery taking place at Darwen Vale. The programme aims to deliver educational and advisory messages to class groups around subjects such as substance misuse, knife crime, peers influences and exploitation, amongst others. Much of the programme content is interactive, engaging children in fun activities whilst ensuring that key lessons are learnt. It is planned that delivery of the programme will be offered and extended to more schools in the New Year.

## **Young People's Services (YPS)**

YPS delivers a residential experience in every Holiday activities, and food (HAF) holiday programme. The Targeted Youth Support (TYS) and SEND full Christmas HAF programmes was delivered from 2<sup>nd</sup> Jan to 7<sup>th</sup> Jan 2024, and include a range of centre-based activities – including food and various trips and visits. Trips organised included visits to Lightopia in Manchester, Smithhills farm to see Father Christmas and trips to Sea life centre, crazy golf, Lazer fazer and Play Factor (indoor play areas) & Chill Factor (indoor skiing). SEND HAF programme is fully booked with a waiting list and YYS expect up to 100 of their caseload to engage over the programme.

Youth Work Week Event - YPS and Blackburn Youth Zone (BYZ) organised and delivered a celebration of local youth work to coincide with the national [Youth Work Week 2023 – NYA](#) in November at Blackburn Youth Zone. Over 100 Young people (YP) attended and engaged in a range of activities including Game design, Climbing, Music, arts and crafts and consultations on Blackburn Town Centre regeneration schemes. The event also helped launch of the new infrastructure charity 'Young BwD'. Blackburn Rovers

Football Club (BRFC) first team player Harry Pickering attended and got involved in the sports activities on the roof top pitch. The event was hosted by BwD Youth Forum.

Targeted Positive Activity Programme with DACA - YPS have developed an ongoing relationship with DACA where a group of Year 11 students in need of additional support, are put on a 10 week programme of team building, challenging activities and self-development. This is the third consecutive programme commissioned by DACA who have seen evidence of the programme working in regard to improving school attendance, behaviour and attainment. The YPS Positive Activity Team are in discussions with other schools/academy trusts to offer similar programmes.

### **Schools and Education**

As an Education Department, we have strong relationships with all our schools and settings working collaboratively to ensure that, *'Every child and young person has the opportunities to fulfil their potential.'* Over the latter half of this academic term, we have shared our new co-produced School Effectiveness Strategy for 2023-2026 with all partners. The strategy clearly details our collective missions, public commitments and shares how we will work towards achieving six agreed joint priorities which are:

- A common speech, language, and communication framework delivered across all Early Years settings.
- Improving attainment for all children.
- Improving emotional health and wellbeing of all children of young people.
- A consistent approach to improving school attendance.
- Delivering on a high-quality Relationships, health, and sex education (RSHE) curriculum.
- Improving provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

This academic year to date, we have had four schools in our borough inspected: one independent, one maintained primary school, one primary academy and one multi-academic trust special school. All schools performed well and were judged to be at least good or outstanding across all areas including overall effectiveness.

### **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)**

This term we have strengthened our partnership working across Blackburn with Darwen as we continue our focus on improving outcomes for all our children and young people including those that are vulnerable and have SEND. Across Blackburn with Darwen the partnership has agreed four key priorities that are based on our current self-evaluation and the last Area SEND Ofsted inspection which last took place in June 2019. Our priorities for the next three years are:

- Ensuring children and young people are well prepared for their next steps including adulthood.
- Commissioning across the partnership fully reflects and meets local needs.
- There is good sufficiency of SEND educational specialist places to meet needs.
- Ensuring strong multi-agency working that ensures children's needs are identified and met without delay.

### **Vulnerable Learners - Emotional Health and Wellbeing**

The emotional health and wellbeing of our school population is one of the most important issues to come out of the post-pandemic era and continues to affect all parts of our school community from pupils and staff to their parents and carers. Last academic year many of our schools (primary and secondary) referred pupils to the Mental Health Support Team for emotional support and it is widely acknowledged that this type of early help, advice and support is vital for our young people.

In response to this, a multi-agency partnership worked together and produced an Emotional Health and Wellbeing (EHWB) Audit which was piloted in 13 schools last September. Following this pilot, the final version of the audit tool and accompanying service appendix was rolled out to all schools in Blackburn with Darwen at the beginning of this year. An Early year's version of this Audit toolkit has now been developed and will be trialled in 8 of our private, voluntary, and independent's (PVI's) in January 2024 with the roll out to all nurseries by Easter 2024.

Working in partnership with the Mental Health Support Team (MHST), Kooth, Blackburn Rovers in the Community, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Support Service (SENDSS), Social emotional and mental health (SEMH) team and Virtual School, we strengthened and co-ordinated the Y6-7 transition offer for pupils with SEND through both in-school intervention and a brand new Y6-7 Transition Information Sharing event was attended by all high schools and primaries. For this academic year, the event will be extended to cover all vulnerable pupils, with the school's SENCO and Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSLs) attending. This is planned for June 2024.

### **Social Care**

## **Early Help**

We continue to lead our strategic partner work on our Family strategy' approach. This is looking at how we can develop further our approach to supporting families, ensuring the right support at the right time. We are moving into our third partnership workshop in February 2024.

## **Children's Advice and Duty Service (CADS), Duty and Assessment and Safeguarding and Support**

As we continue our focus on recruitment, we have seen previous Social Workers return to the Service showing we are an employer of choice and have a positive reputation. Social Work Apprentices have started in the service and are enjoying their placements. Our agency usage remains lower than in comparison to other Local authorities (LAs), although it has increased slightly to 15 agency workers in this area of the service which also reflects a recent increase in demand in the service.

We continue to embed the learning and actions from our Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) with partners and within our front door, the impact of this is being measured through our Quality Assurance framework. We have a relentless focus on achieving consistency in practice within the service.

We are preparing for our annual Peer Challenge with Senior Leaders of other LAs in January and our annual conversation with OFSTED in February 2024.

## **Engage**

An independent review by the Innovate team of the Engage service took place in October 2023. The key findings that were identified, evidenced how the service can build on the already strong foundations and excellent practice. Some of the highlights noted how passionate and skilled the team and their managers are, that children's voices are heard and understood.

## **SEEDS**

The SEEDS have recently held a girl's group, this consisted of 6 girls attending weekly sessions. Through the sessions the girls looked at ways to improve confidence and self-esteem and build on positive relationships. They were rewarded with being taken to Manchester Christmas Markets on the 19.12.2023. Five young people have also attended swimming lessons, and all have improved their confidence with water skills.

The SEEDS held a consultation with the young people in October to ask them how they wanted to celebrate Christmas with us. The young people were given options and the activities we have completed with them have been:

- Pantomime.
- Fun Factor and Father Christmas Experience.
- Ice Skating
- Meal Out

All the young people have given positive feedback, and some have had new experiences by attending their chosen session.

The recent Ofsted inspection (14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> November) rated the SEEDS as GOOD and stated: The short-break service offers children a safe environment where they can enjoy activities and experiences, they may not otherwise access.

A strong safeguarding culture underpins practice in the home and staff are effective in keeping children safe.

The manager demonstrates aspirational leadership. She is supported by an experienced and highly motivated staff team.

Ofsted heard from our young people who stated that the Seeds has helped them to:

- Rebuild relationships with your family,
- Make new friends.
- Enjoy going to school.
- Develop your confidence.
- Manage your emotions much better.

The list could go on, but you would be reading for a long time!

## **Children in our Care**

The updated strategy is being formed next year and will be co-produced with children and parents. Recent audits have taken place within the service to support us further strengthening our practice for our children.

## **Fostering**

The new Recruitment Hub for Fostering, which BwD are the lead across the cluster of Lancashire County Council (LCC), Blackpool and North and South Cumbria, has seen the launch of all the Hub design groups this month. Colleagues from various departments across each LA and foster carers representatives coming together to coproduce a whole new service and front door experience for perspective foster carer enquiries.

In addition to the Fostering Recruitment Hub, we are introducing the Mockingbird Model, which is part of the Stable Homes, Built on Love, social work reform agenda. The Mockingbird Model delivers sustainable foster care through an evidence-based model structured around the support and relationships an extended family provides. The model nurtures the relationships between children, young people and foster families supporting them to build a resilient and caring community.

## **REVIVE**

3 members of the team have now completed Level 2 training in Developmental Dyadic Psychotherapy (DDP): a specialist therapy and framework for supporting children and families with trauma and attachment needs.

With supervision in place, they would like to go on now to become certified practitioners. Based on the principles of DDP, the team have now run 3 'foundations of attachment groups', with the 4<sup>th</sup> to start mid-February. This is a 6-week course for carers to help support them in their relationships with their children/young people. Feedback has been very positive to date.

## **Leaving care**

The leaving care service hosted a winter event on the 11<sup>th</sup> December 2023 to celebrate the end of the year which was a great success and was supported by Darwen Influencer Sophie Lee. Sophie met with some of our care experienced young people sharing her story as well as listening to their inspirational achievements.

Christmas gifts for our care experienced young people were distributed in December after generous donations from local businesses, partner agencies and local councillors.

Blackburn with Darwen Council staff also contributed. In particular, the Highways department who always excel themselves. The gifts totalled £2000, and this generosity has ensured that all care experienced young adults aged 18-25 years received a gift for Christmas.