

# 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, 14 March 2024**

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

### **External Scrutiny**

Over the last two months Childrens Services and Education (CS and Ed) have received external Scrutiny of their work from The Northwest Association of Directors of Children's Services and Ofsted.

In January members of the Senior leadership team in CS and Ed joined the DCS in Manchester for scrutiny from three other councils of our Self Evaluation document. This was a really positive process with feedback showing we know ourselves and our areas of strength and further improvement work. In February once again the team met with OFSTED at Piccadilly gate as part of OFSTEDs process of Annual Conversations with Councils. Again, our Self Evaluation was scrutinised with the wider team. It is always positive to receive scrutiny on our work and to celebrate progress made. We look forward to our letter from OFSTED summarising our Annual Conversation.

### **Young People's Services**

#### **Further YIF Success**

Young Peoples Services (YPS) has been successful in securing £140k of redevelopment funds that will create bespoke youth engagement spaces over 2 floors at Wensley Fold Children's Centre. The renovation will include high quality music spaces, game cave, teaching kitchen, multi-function rooms, bushcraft as well as a large space to deliver open access traditional youth club type activities and support. YPS and a range of local partners will deliver activities from the space including open access and more targeted specialist services for children and young people from the local neighbourhood and beyond. This builds further on the YIF grant of £8 million raised between the council and local partners that will rebuild Darwen Youth Centre, create a bespoke Youth Centre in Audley & Queens Park Childrens Centre, in partnership with IMO, develop the Fuse Box at Blackburn Youth Zone and a new build in Shadsworth led by Newground Together. The developments at Wensley Fold and Audley & Queens Park also support the Start for Life programme where the council is bringing services that support families into one neighbourhood building.

#### **Youth MP Elections**

YPS are in the final stages of preparation for this year's Youth MP elections. As we stand, we have 9 candidates that have been supported by schools or local youth organisations. Candidates are currently putting their final touches to their campaigns and their election videos. Voting will be open between 26<sup>th</sup> February until March 8<sup>th</sup> with the results announced in the council chambers on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> March. At the same time Young People across the Borough will be asked to vote on the national Make Your Mark Campaign. Led by the British Youth Council 'Make Your Mark' is a national consultation where young people vote on a range of issues with the top 3 becoming national campaign issues for the British Youth Council.

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

The YJS are collaborating with the Community Safety Team and Police on several fronts to enhance its service delivery. Firstly, a Youth Referral Panel is being developed that will enable front line Police Officers to refer children and young people who are coming to their attention for repeated incidents of anti-social behaviour. It is planned that the YJS will look to support those children, where appropriate, through their Prevention or 'Turnaround' offer in the hope of intervening to avoid ongoing incidents or their escalation into criminality. Work is also ongoing across the agencies to reinvigorate the Stay Safe events, ensuring they are fit for purpose for safeguarding and supporting children and young people at night-time. Finally, the 'In Your Corner' programme delivered in schools will hopefully incorporate a new feature of virtual reality headsets in the near future. The YJS are in the process of sourcing an educational programme of work that uses the technology as an engaging and interactive means of achieving key messages around topics such as knife crime, peer influences and gangs.

## **Children's Social Care**

### **Children in our Care and the Corporate Parenting Strategy**

The corporate parenting and care experienced strategy are being updated- a multi-agency session took place in January 2024, fully informed by the views and experiences of our children and young people. The updated strategy will be shared at our corporate parenting partnership, and we will forward plan how we understand the impact of this on outcomes for our children and young people.

### **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. Our third partnership workshop is taking place in February 2024. We are working with our partners and strategic leads on a collective response to the new updated Working Together to Safeguard Children guidelines.

### **Engage**

In partnership with the ADHD Foundation Neurodiversity Charity, on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2024 Engage are hosting Neurodiversity in Children and Young People training for 100 attendees across the Blackburn with Darwen multi-agency footprint. This follows one of our Engage Deputy Team Managers, receiving funding through completion of a research project with University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN), which identified neurodiversity as being a significant risk factor of vulnerability for children and young people experiencing exploitation. Currently, 1 in 5 people live with ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia, DCD, Dyscalculia and other types of neurodiversity and the training will aim to equip us all as professionals to be advocates for our children and young people living with and impacted by this, reflecting Engage's strength based and trauma informed approach in supporting children and young people at risk of harm through exploitation.

### **Fostering**

We are moving forward with the Implementation Plan for the Regional Fostering Recruitment Hub that Blackburn with Darwen are leading on. We are in discussions with leads in Children's services to look at options of the team being based in one of the Family Hubs which will be a positive community base. Recruitment is picking up momentum with the Service Lead taking up post in April and shortlisting commencing for the various roles. We have had a great response to the adverts for each of the roles from Business Support, Marketing and Comms lead and all the recruitment Coordinators and will be interviewing week commencing the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 2024. Our HR colleagues have worked wonders in the organisation of the recruitment activity, we are fortunate to have great working relationships with them. Our aim is to launch the Hub in May 2024.

Meanwhile our fostering recruitment activity has surged since December with our continued activity ranging from full page articles in various magazines, at arenas and events, foster information evenings, the 1voice awards to continued google and Facebook ads. We currently have four strong Register of Interests that we are following up, six prospective foster carer households in assessment and two moving into assessment from their initial visit and one household being presented for full approval in March 2024. Despite this being a very positive picture for us, the conversion rate from enquiry to approval has been a challenge over the last number of years, this is not localised to BwD or the northwest, but is the picture nationally. Due to this consistent issue, the DfE prioritised the trailblazer recruitment hubs and we are hopeful, with the launch of our Fostering Hub, we will see a positive impact going forward.

To add to this, we are significantly moving forward in collaboration with Fostering Network coaches, our Implementation Plan to launch Mockingbird in our fostering service. Mockingbird, a global award winning and pioneering programme led by The Fostering Network in the UK, aims to deliver sustainable foster care. It is 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. It is led by a hub home foster carer and liaison worker, with the support of their fostering service, the constellation community offers vital peer support and guidance alongside social activities and sleepovers to strengthen relationships and permanence. We think this, alongside our new hub, will enhance our sustainability of local, stable, loving homes for children who need to be cared for. We aim to launch this in October 2024.

### **SEND and Vulnerable Learners**

#### **Co-production Charter**

Over the last couple of months BWD SEND partnership have been working on developing engagement and co-production. We are now pleased to have a 'Co-Production Charter' that outlines and highlights how we will work together to make a positive difference for our Children, Young People with SEND and their families. This is available to view on the Local Offer.

### **Annual Disability Information Day 2024**

BWD Annual Disability Information Day was held on the 27th of February 2024 at King Georges Hall. The event provided an opportunity to families to visit stands from a variety of local providers, the NHS and voluntary services to ask questions, share information and find out what support services are available for them. The event also provided an opportunity to find out about how our schools, settings and services in BWD are working together to support children and young people for transitions including their next steps in preparing for adulthood.

## **Education**

There are 6 key priorities for 2023-2026 identified by BWD School Effectiveness Partnership Strategy. Priority 1 is around developing and improving children's speech, language, and communication through a joint framework delivered across all early year's settings. Therefore, last September (2022), a borough wide initiative was launched to improve Children's Speech, Language and Communication outcomes as we know that this is the biggest barrier to securing strong children's development and academic outcomes.

### The initiative included:

- An Early Years Speech and Language Audit Tool – this was developed to support Quality First Teaching within schools and settings. The LA and Speech and Language Therapy teams paired up to support ten schools and settings with completing this audit, as part of a pilot. Feedback from this pilot has been excellent and the decision was made to continue this joint approach into the academic year 2023-2024, where another ten schools and settings will be supported.
- WellComm Toolkit: A Speech and Language screening toolkit was provided universally to all Primary Schools and Early Years settings within the borough. External training was commissioned by the Local Authority via 'Communicate SLT' and data was collected from the Local Authority via the WellComm wizard throughout the academic year.

This initiative has proved successful and there was a big improvement in the number of children across the borough achieving age-appropriate language levels, rising from 33% to 58% by the end of the academic year 2023. In addition, settings have used the resources to target support for children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) resulting in 20% more EAL children achieving age-appropriate language levels between October 2022 and May 2023.

## **Family Hubs**

Blackburn with Darwen Family Hubs are built around ensuring help doesn't end when a child starts school. Our Family Hubs work in conjunction with our Children's Centres and bring together the different kinds of support parents need at different times. Our Family Hubs serve families 0-19 (up to 25 years of age for young people with special educational needs or disabilities) from birth right through to the primary and secondary school years. They use a strength-based approach doing things 'with' families rather than 'to' them, building relationships that will last across many years.

Our four Family Hubs based geographically at Livesey, Darwen, Little Harwood and Shadsworth have been founded on positive engagement and co-produced with our families. Parents have designed the Family Hub branding and have been involved in the design of the 'Start for Life' website which will detail the full offer for families (ready at the end of February 2024).

The list of core services that the family hubs are delivering are:

- Reducing parental conflict
- Dispute resolution - support for out of court options (private law children's cases)
- Debt and welfare support
- Mental health services (beyond Start for Life parent-infant mental health)
- Oral health improvement/tooth brushing
- Substance misuse support
- Wider family health services (e.g. healthy weight and nutrition, contraception, and sexual health, stop smoking support)
- Supporting Families programme
- Housing support
- Youth services
- SEND support services.
- Early childhood education and care and financial support for childcare – via telephone
- Early language skills (HLE) -whole borough approach including all Private provider nurseries, childminders, nursery schools and classes.
- Parenting programmes
- Domestic abuse support
- Start for Life Universal Services (midwifery, health visiting, parent-infant mental health, breastfeeding, safeguarding, SEND)

The 0-19 Health visiting teams are also based in the family hubs as well as other co located partner organisations for example, Education Psychologists, physiotherapists.