

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

Children's Services

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service

The IRO service have piloted a new approach to child protection conferences. The changes included reducing the length of conferences, ensuring parents feel supported during the meeting and making the meetings more purposeful. There is an expectation that professionals share their report with families prior to the meeting, enabling there to be focussed discussions around what we are worried about and what is working well. Positive feedback has been received from children, families and across the partnership. Areas of learning are being considered through team development days to ensure feedback is considered within our approach moving forward.

Practice Development and Quality Assurance

Blackburn with Darwen wish to continue to develop a learning culture and drive improvements therefore have planned a number of peer reviews to take place between September and January, these will consider:

- Leaving care
- Fostering and Children in our Care
- Public law outline

We will use the learning from these reviews to continue to enhance and strengthen practice across the service.

We are involved with a number of pieces of regional improvement work across the Northwest to share learning and to develop practice. A few examples include communities of practice around social work models, developing a shared approach to recruitment, retention and use of agency social workers, and redesigning the Self Evaluation Framework (SEF).

Children with a Disability Team

Following consultation with parents and carers of children and young people with a disability in BwD via our Disability Links Facebook Page, it was identified that there was an unmet need for a greater focus on preparation for adulthood for those children with a severe or profound disability, with a move away from a focus on transition to adult social care. As part of the design of this work, parents and young people shared that they would welcome a group that young people could attend to develop and practice their skills alongside other young people. Over the summer a 4 week group was held which was run by the children with a disability service; this helped a small group of young people to develop their skills around understanding money and making a purchase, preparing a snack and getting a drink, basic cleaning and also personal hygiene. Feedback is now being gathered around the impact of this in order to inform our planning around the next sessions that will be held. The Designated Officer for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is collaborating with the team to learn from the group so this can be cascaded through the early help offer for SEND.

Fostering

The Fostering Recruitment Hub, Foster with Us, have held launch events throughout August for the 'Summer of Fun Roadshow' with venues at each of the five Local Authorities in the cluster. The events were held as a 'thank you' to all of our current foster carers from all five LAs, to thank them for the care, commitment and support that they provide for our children and young people. The media and comms from these events will then be used to promote Foster with Us to attract interest from potential applicants and to tell our story in a more eye-catching and engaging way for the public. At each event, attended by DCS', Elected Members, and Fostering Teams, we have informed our existing foster carers about Foster with Us, and the objective to recruit and retain more carers for our children and young people. The events have been positive in terms of celebrating our foster carers, encouraging their support with the Fostering Hub, and boosting our social media presence. Networking with colleagues from all five Local Authorities from both an operational and Senior level has also been invaluable at the five events. It is too soon to report back if the events have had a direct impact on enquiries and this will be reported once intelligence can be gathered now the events have come to an end. Feedback from all events has been hugely positive.

Mockingbird

We are well on our way to implementing our first Mockingbird constellation, we have recruited to the Hub Carer role and the Liaison Worker role. We are currently in the process of identifying satellite carers. We are on track to launch our first constellation in October.

We have recently had a summer teddy bears picnic for all kinship carers who have been historically difficult to engage in groups and events and have often felt excluded. The kinship team have worked hard to engage kinship carers with newsletters, monthly support groups, SGO support and an updated kinship care website. The impact of this work was seen in the number of kinship carers that attended the teddy bear picnic with attendance very high and feedback from kinship carers, children and YP being positive.

Early Help

In July the service was inspected by BwD Young Inspectors' and the 1st GOLD award was given. They visited Earcroft centre, and their findings were a highly effective and supportive environment for children, young people and their families. The young inspectors reported that the centre demonstrates excellence across various standards, including the quality of provision, accessibility, staff training, and the involvement of children and young people.

The report concluded:

The quality of provision at Earcroft is exceptional, with the centre catering to the diverse needs of children and adolescents from ages 0 to 19. The Investors in People accreditation highlights the centre's commitment to high standards and staff development. The variety of facilities, combined with a warm and welcoming environment, ensures that young people have access to engaging activities and tailored support. The dedication of the staff, who maintain relatability by staying current with youth trends and creating personalised plans, further enhances the service quality. The structured framework for planning and evaluation ensures that young people's voices are integral to the centre's operations, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment among them.

The involvement of young people is central to the centre's operations, with numerous opportunities for them to voice their opinions and influence decision-making processes. The staff's professional yet personal approach fosters an environment of trust and openness, contributing to positive outcomes for young people.

Young People's Services (YPS)

YPS delivers the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) programme over Easter, Summer and Christmas to both its Targeted Youth Support (TYS) and SEND cohorts. Both programmes delivered over 7 days and more than the prescribed 4 hours/ 4 days/ 4 weeks:

TYS HAF Summer delivery

- All TYS caseload (currently 126) have taken part in the programme – most attending weekly.

- 2 x weekend residentials - one to Anderton Centre and one to Bibby's Farm
- Daily Activities at the new Wensley Fold building – including new music sessions
- Daily trips and visits including Seaside/Museums/Laser Quest/Bowling/Go Ape/Outdoor ed/Water sports/Parks/Markets – we even took in a BRFC Home game

SEND Inclusion HAF Summer delivery

- All places fully booked up!
- 26 C&YP (5 to 8 years), 101 C&YP (8 to 19 years) and 10 C&YP (18 to 25 transition group) have been supported in the HAF summer offer. Total of 127 unique C&YP
- 2 x residentials - both to Waterpark on Lake Coniston
- Additional £10k was sourced via BwD Public Health. The team delivered an additional 4 sessions per week across the different age ranges and based on young people's needs, plus one additional Waterpark residential. This included a trial of a new 18- 25 years 'transitions' club.
- Daily activities and sessions from Kaleidoscope Youth Centre
- Trips and visits including Seaside/Museums/Space Centre/ Thornton Hall/Bowling/Outdoor ed/Water sports/Parks/Markets – again we took in a BRFC Home game

Wensley Fold Children's Centre – Opening Day

- The much-anticipated day came to officially open the newly renovated Wensley Fold Children Centre - Youth development. Which is another of our Youth Investment Fund success stories. Comprising new youth club spaces, game cave, wellbeing zone, activities areas, teaching kitchens, bushcraft and cutting-edge music/media rooms – the building has been used during the summer HAF programme and also hosts regular weekly youth clubs and Alternative Education sessions via partner We Are Noise.

Engage Service

The Engage Team are currently developing training for all council staff and relevant partners to raise awareness of the signs of, and response to criminal and sexual exploitation of children and vulnerable young adults. The training will be available through the Safeguarding Children's Partnership on a rolling basis and will aim to capture as wide an audience as possible. Whilst a key target will be for front line practitioners working directly with children and families, it is also our intention to reach other workers in the borough who may encounter relevant situations, such as taxi drivers, hotel staff etc. It is hoped that this awareness raising will raise the profile of these concerns enabling Engage and Social Care to respond and safeguard more children.

Education – Outcomes

Key Stage 2

The DFE released individual Year 6 pupil level data to schools in July 2024 as well as national headline statistics for attainment of Year 6 pupils who took Key Stage 2 SATS assessments in summer 2024. Performance Measures Data will not be available to Local Authorities until schools have completed their data checking exercise in early September.

Caution is advised when considering any data for the academic year 2023/2024 as these pupils experienced considerable disruption to their learning during the pandemic, particularly at the end of Year 2 and in Year 3.

Nationally, overall children's attainment in individual subjects increased in reading, writing and science compared to 2023, while attainment remained the same in maths and grammar, punctuation and spelling. Attainment in Blackburn with Darwen increased in reading and maths but fell slightly in writing, grammar, punctuation & spelling and science

- In reading, 72% of pupils met the expected standard, up from 71% in 2023. (74% national)
- In maths, 76% of pupils met the expected standard, up from 73% in 2023. (73% national)
- In writing, 70% of pupils met the expected standard, down from 71% in 2023. (72% national)

- In grammar, punctuation and spelling, 73% of pupils met the expected standard, down from 74% in 2023. (72% national)
- In science, 78% of pupils met the expected standard, down from 79% in 2023. (81% national)
- Attainment in all of reading, writing and maths (combined) rose to 61%, up from 59% in 2023. (same as national, 61%)

Key Stage 4

Grades for GCSEs this year Grading has continued as normal in summer 2024, following the return to pre-pandemic standards last year. Nationally, overall GCSE results are similar to summer 2023.

- 21.7% of GCSEs were graded 9-7, compared to 21.6% in 2023
- 67.4% were graded 9-4, compared to 67.8% in 2023.

Early Indications are that Blackburn with Darwen's results are also broadly similar to last year. Regional and school level data is not expected to be published until the end of this year.

School attendance

School Attendance Regulations 2024 came into force on the 19th of August 2024. As a local authority and working closely with our schools, we were already meeting these new regulations. The Inclusion Team currently hold termly meetings with schools to discuss attendance concerns, absence fines and thresholds. All our schools share attendance figures with the Department for Education.

Early Years Entitlement Offer

In line with Department of Education's roll out of the largest ever expansion of free childcare in England, Blackburn with Darwen working families are now eligible for:

- 15 hours entitlement for eligible working parents of children from 9 months to 3 years old (new entitlement from 1 September 2024)
- 15 hours entitlement for disadvantaged 2-year-olds
- 15 hours universal entitlement for all 3 and 4-year-olds
- 15 hours additional entitlement for eligible working parents of 3 and 4-year-olds

***Children become eligible from the term after their birthday e.g. the term after they are 9 months, 2 years, or 3 years old*

***Families accessing entitlements due to their working status must renew their eligibility every term*

National Childcare Wraparound Programme

The National Wraparound Programme is part of the childcare reforms announced at the 2023 Spring Budget. At Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council we have had a successful first round of applications for funding, with 11 primary schools and providers applying for funding to increase their wraparound provision. This first round of applications has resulted in 130 additional places, which will be provided before and after school, to help us reach the government expectation of providing wraparound from 8am – 6pm, Monday to Friday. All applications were approved by our funding panel, and there are applications still being processed, which could provide for an additional 100 places. Further funding rounds will be progressed in the Autumn term, with colleagues from the education department available to offer advice and support to schools and providers on making applications for both capital and revenue funding.