

NUMBERS OF CHILDREN IN CARE & CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE INFORMATION

Recent regional analysis and national publicity has pointed to increasing demand pressures on children's services, with particular pressures in the North and North West. The North generally has seen rising numbers of children in care over recent years, with particular pressure around children and young people in older age groups with very complex social and behavioural issues. During 2017, Blackburn with Darwen moved towards the regional norm with a marked rise in the number of children in care placed in the most costly residential placements. During 2018 there was a slight fall in the number of children in care in external residential placements, which is to be welcomed, but this has been off-set by a recent rise in the number of children in care placed in independent fostering agency placements.

There has been a surge of work coming into Children's Social Care through the latter part of 2018 and early part of 2019. The number of Children in our Care is 411, which is a historically high figure and points to increasing prevalence of unacceptable levels of risk to children and young people within families in local communities. The number of children subject to child protection plans remains high and has risen to 276, and the total number of children and young people open to Children's Social Care remains high at 1,943. In addition, over 700 children are being supported by Early Help services, which means that nearly 7% of the 0 to 19 year old child population is being supported by the council's Children's Services or partner agencies. 20 children have been adopted since April 2018 and 18 children are currently placed in adoptive placements.

MAKE A NOISE CONSULTATION FUN DAY

Children's Services teams and health and education partners worked together to deliver the Make a Noise consultation fun day for children open to social care in the February half term holiday at Darwen Vale High School. 45 children and young people across the age range, 23 parent/carers and invited guests enjoyed a wide range of hands-on participation activities with 17 stalls. Activities were designed to capture the views of children and young people to find out what is important to them and what they would like their corporate parents to get better at and prioritise.

Facilitators enjoyed offering face painting, messy play, badge making, arts and crafts, photo booth, dance and a penalty shootout which was especially enjoyed by the older boys and supervised by a Care Leaver.

The views captured will support the development of a new and updated corporate parenting strategy which will evidence the voice of the child and reach out to more young people across our service. A new and refreshed 'Children in our Care' website is being developed so that burning issues can be listened to and responded to.

YOUTH ELECTIONS 2019/20

Over 9,300 young people voted in the recent Blackburn with Darwen Youth Elections for 2019/20 and the newly appointed Youth MP is Uday Akram from Tauheedul Islam Boys' High School. The Deputy Youth MPs are A'aisha Patel from Tauheedul Islam Girls' High School and Corey McPartland from The Studio/Darwen Youth Club. The successful trio will promote their key campaign issues which are Tackling Homelessness, Food Poverty,

Mental Health, a curriculum to prepare us for life and increasing opportunities for young people to take part in residential and extracurricular activities. I congratulate all three on their appointments and look forward to supporting them in the coming year.

CHANGES TO LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD (LSCB) ARRANGEMENTS

The Children & Social Work Act 2017 requires that new Safeguarding Partnerships be created by 29th June 2019, stepping away from Local Authorities being the lead partner with responsibility to set the local safeguarding arrangements under the LSCB model, to the Local Authority, CCG and Police being jointly responsible.

Proposed arrangements will see a Pan-Lancashire Safeguarding Strategic Partnership with equal responsibilities and leadership from the three Local Authorities across the footprint (Blackburn with Darwen, Lancashire & Blackpool), the Police and the 8 Clinical Commissioning Groups. Beneath this Board will sit three Locality Groups (East, Central & Coastal) which will identify priorities specific to their areas. The functions of the new partnership arrangements will be covered by a number of sub-groups, all with a focus to ensure that there is consistency in outcomes for children across the 3 Local Authority areas.

STRATEGIC YOUTH ALLIANCE

A 'Strategic Youth Alliance' has been formed to bring together youth sector organisations to develop and coordinate a borough-wide offer of universal provision for young people. The three-way partnership between the Council, Blackburn Youth Zone and Blackburn Rovers Community Trust will see each partner organisation contributing resources to a universal neighbourhood and holiday provision.

The three organisations will form the Strategic Youth Alliance Board and will be responsible for provision across communities during term-time and key holiday periods. The Board will be supported by a Youth Alliance Network consisting of key youth sector partners already delivering in neighbourhoods to increase the provision available to children and young people.

The Alliance will work collectively to secure external funding to enhance universal neighbourhood provision and support to smaller youth sector organisations in order to meet the needs of young people in local communities.

Schools Working Together Conference

A 'Schools Working Together' conference on 1st March brought together pupils from eight of the borough's secondary schools. Over the last twelve months the pupils have collaborated on activities designed to foster understanding between people from different culture and faith backgrounds.

As well as hearing one pupil's first hand account of surviving a terror attack in Pakistan, the young people also took part in workshops which explored themes around challenging stereotypes, countering extremist attitudes, and social integration. The pupils will meet again in the summer term to put forward their suggestions of activities to work on together to strengthen the cross-cultural relationships that they have started to build.

OFSTED INSPECTIONS

The Adolescent Support Unit which provides short breaks for young people who are experiencing emotional difficulties received a full Ofsted inspection in January. The home retained their 'good' judgement and staff were praised for providing quality, supportive relationships and listening to and acting on the 'voice of the child'. The report states '*Staff provide a warm, nurturing environment for young people. Staff are skilled at quickly building up positive relationships with young people. Children's views are listened to. One young person said, 'This is like a second home. The staff have listened to me and helped me to chill out more.'*

Since the last Council Forum report, four schools have received their Ofsted reports. Turton Belmont Community Primary School, Turton and Edgworth CE Primary School and St Stephen's CE Primary School all retained their 'good' judgements.

Longshaw Nursery School received a 'good' judgement in all areas, following an inadequate judgement in May 2017. The report highlighted that 'the executive headteacher, senior leaders and members of the interim executive board (IEB) have swiftly brought stability back to the leadership and management of the school'.

Pleckgate High School is particularly celebrating their Ofsted report having secured outstanding judgements in all areas - effectiveness of leadership and management; outstanding in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; outstanding in personal development, behaviour and welfare and outstanding in outcomes for pupils. The school's leadership and governing body have been very ambitious, making brave decisions to elevate the school from an inadequate judgement five years ago.

GOVERNORS' CONFERENCE

The 2019 annual Governors Conference is planned for 30th March at Blackburn Central High School. The theme this year is 'Inclusion' with the Director of the 'Council for Disabled Children' confirmed as Key Note speaker. Blackburn Rovers, Youth Zone, Inter Madrassah Organisation and Parents in Partnership will be attending to showcase what help is available to support children and young people.