

DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL (CHILDREN) AND STATUTORY LEAD MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES – COUNCILLOR LYNN WILLIAMS

The 'People' area covers my portfolio and those of:

- Councillor Kathryn Benson (Schools, Education and Aspiration)

The full details of the portfolio areas can be found on the Council's website at
<https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Your-councillors/Executive-members.aspx>

Corporate and Strategic Issues

OFSTED / Commissioner Update

On the 16 and 17 December 2019, OFSTED visited Children's Social Care to undertake their second Monitoring Visit after the inspection. They focused their scrutiny on the Assessment and Support and Strengthening and Supporting Families services in social care, reviewing the case work of these teams, sitting alongside staff and examining ways of working. The inspectors also reviewed the area of focus for their first monitoring visit. The letter outlining the outcome of this visit was published by OFSTED on the 21 January. The inspectors note that the improvements that they saw in August, which were outlined in the Council report in September, had been sustained and that the Council is "moving in the right direction" in relation to the systematic change which is underway.

The inspectors confirmed that we know ourselves well and that they were presented with an honest appraisal of progress. As I am sure members will have noted from the published letter, the OFSTED visit found that there is still much improvement to be made in the practice in the areas they reviewed. The pace of change and, most crucially the impact on children and families, is not where we want it to be across all areas of the service. However, we have to acknowledge that the scale of change required is substantial and is only possible with the right staff, skills and leadership in place. OFSTED recognised the strength of the Workforce Development Strategy for Blackpool and the strategies that are in place to recruit, retain and develop our social workers are closely monitored through the Getting to Good Board.

Following a huge amount of work over the last year, we now have a strong model of practice that has been coproduced with young people, families and professionals. This was presented to Research in Practice (RiP) who feedback that it was the best model of its type that they had seen. The model is brought to life through strengths based and restorative practice training, this is being delivered across the workforce now and through the coming weeks in conjunction with our partners in practice in Leeds and Stockport. Since the last report to Council the service has been working with Essex, Leeds, Stockport and the DfE appointed advisor to move forward

with key developments including the development of a strong, restorative and family-based Edge of Care Service and a new model of Family Group Conferencing so that families who need help to function well as parents have strong support. These developments will ensure that our statutory services can focus on those families where there is a need to prevent further significant harm.

Changes to the recording system for our social work teams are due to go live in the next month. This will support the implementation of the new ways of working and some of the key changes will reduce the burden of recording for our social workers and managers, particularly when they are working with families with large sibling groups.

The Independent Commissioner for Children's Services, Helen Lincoln, visited in January and held challenge sessions with the Corporate Leadership Team, Service Managers from across Children's Services, the Leader and the previous Lead Member. I am pleased that after applying significant rigor to examining our change journey, they continue to consider the progress being made by the Council to be positive, and their recommendations are supporting the improvement plans.

Performance in Children's Social Care

Whilst demand at the front door of social care remains high when compared with other, similar local authorities, we have seen a reduction over the past six months in the number of concerns about children that are being presented to social care and those that progress on to become formal referrals. This is a positive trend and speaks to improvement in partnership working that is ensuring that agencies working with families are starting to think differently about their role in supporting families.

The number of children in care has continued to rise and is now 627, the Getting to Good Board closely monitors this and this rise includes a planned increase where, after purposeful and focused support the significant harm to children as a result of long-term parental neglect has not been reduced. The numbers of children entering care in 2019/ 2020 is relatively low; the trend in the year to date indicates that the number entering care in the past year is 20% lower than the average annual figure for the past five years. The reason that the number of children in care continues to rise is that the number of children leaving care is low. Through 2019, there has been a decrease in the numbers of children leaving care through special guardianship orders and, to a lesser extent, adoption and other routes of exit, such as the discharge of care orders for children in our care placed at home with parents on care orders. Dedicated resource has been redirected into social care teams to attempt to address this as appropriate and it is anticipated that this will have an impact on the overall numbers of children in the care system as the improvement journey progresses.

Transforming Services

Visit from Palix Foundation and the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative

In October the Blackpool Centre for Early Child Development welcomed Nancy Mannix, the Chair and Patron of the Palix Foundation and Michelle Gagnon, President of the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative (AFWI) to the town along with a range of guests including the Office of the New Zealand Prime Minister, Oxford University, Synergos Institute and the Royal Foundation, among others, to find out more about the Blackpool ‘Place Based’ approach to early child development. Blackpool Better Start has been a partner of the AFWI for five years since a team from Blackpool, including Cllr Ivan Taylor and Merle Davies, were invited to attend one of their annual conventions to gain a better understanding of how the Blackpool Better Start Strategy and vision could translate into practice.

The Palix Foundation focuses on alignment between science, policy and practice in the area of brain development and its implications on mental health treatment and applies this research to policies and practices that support positive lifelong health outcomes.

Palix has established a partnership with Oxford University who will be running a pilot in Blackpool to embed Brain story in homes through our new Nursery support pilot. A formal partnership between Blackpool and Oxford University is also being formalised. A pilot is now underway with six schools to deliver a trauma informed approach, which will be then be rolled out across all schools in Blackpool.

Troubled Families Funding

I am pleased to report that funding has been confirmed to extend the Troubled Families work in Blackpool by a further year. The work in Blackpool has strong partnership support and is key to ensuring that families are supported in the right way at the right time to overcome challenges.

Working with Partners

Children and Families Partnership

In the last report to members, it was reported that we were developing a partnership to oversee a whole town approach to addressing the core issues that face our children and families and create the foundations for a Child and Family Friendly Blackpool. The inaugural meeting with the new partnership has been held and it has been welcomed as a means to unify the aims and objectives of a number of key transformative partnerships across the town into a single vision, supported by some radical and innovative plans. The partnership provides an opportunity to share the best of the work that is making a difference for families, as well as a place to explore how influential agencies can work differently and collaboratively. This new partnership will lead on the delivery of the “Blackpool Families Rock” approach across the town.

Education and Schools

I am pleased to share with you that the publication of revised Primary School Performance data just before Christmas confirmed the exceptional performance of Blackpool's primary schools in 2019. The data published by the Department for Education shows 2% more children achieving expected levels of performance in Reading, Writing and Maths than in England overall (67% in Blackpool, compared to 65% for England overall or 64% in Lancashire).

Progress in Blackpool's primary schools is much better than average in Reading and performance in Maths is especially strong. Independent analysis undertaken by an educational data charity, Fischer Family Trust, shows that the progress achieved in Blackpool's primary schools in 2019 is amongst the top fifth of local authority areas nationally.

2019 is not a one-off. Analysis of the performance of Blackpool's primary schools over the past three years shows that the progress made by children attending those schools (taking into account the background of those children) is amongst the top 10% of local authority areas in England.

Publication of the finalised national secondary school performance statistics for the 2019 GCSE's has been delayed following the discovery that data was incorrectly inputted into the system, including re-marks in key GCSEs such as English and Maths. These errors could have a material impact on some reported school data. The revised information will now be published in February and will form part of my next report to Council.

Congratulations to all at Highfurlong!

I am sure that members will wish to join me in congratulating the Headteacher, staff, parents and pupils of Highfurlong School where there have been two fantastic achievements since the last Council meeting. On 14 October 2019, students at Highfurlong School held the official opening of their enterprise shop, the Gift Box. The new facility is the culmination of a significant effort by the pupils to raise funding and bring their dream to reality. Over recent years, the school has followed an "Enterprise Education" approach, which:

- Assists young people to become more enterprising in their approach to life and in particular work
- Provides a focus on the development of entrepreneurship and supports the learning of the individual student
- Encompasses core skills, employability skills, career education, work based/ related learning, "skills for life" and aspects of personal and social development, and enables development of transferable skills in order to prepare for adulthood

The Gift Shop, which has the strap-line "We think outside the box", has been partly funded by a contribution from HeadStart's Schools Innovation Fund. Pupils had to present their ideas to a Panel in order to secure the funding and members were impressed by the commitment of the students, the detailed planning that they had put in place and the successful track record that they could demonstrate from previous enterprise efforts. The young people could clearly

articulate how involvement in the enterprise programme helps to improve the resilience of pupils right across the school. Part of the profits from the enterprise scheme are re-invested in the business, for example to purchase items of printing equipment, while the remainder is paid out as wages to the young people who spend their time on enterprise activities. The new shop, which will be run by the students, is now a permanent fixture at the Blackpool Old Road school site and is open on Thursday mornings from 10.00 to 11.30 a.m.

Following on from this and unsurprisingly to anyone who has had the privilege to visit the school, Highfurlong was awarded the title of “Happiest School” in the recent National Happiness Awards. The School won because the judges were so impressed by the dedication of the whole school in ensuring the wellbeing of every child who is part of their family.

Our congratulations are also due to Keith Berry, Head teacher of Park Community Academy who won the Pearson Education Award for Lifelong Achievement in Education. Keith is an outstanding Head teacher who has devoted his life to achieving the best possible outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs. Keith’s vision for the provision of SEND across Blackpool has driven Park Academy’s four Outstanding OFSTED judgements. He is ‘unwavering in his ambition for pupils, their families and staff and provides exceptionally effective leadership’ (Ofsted May 18).

Keith has been instrumental in many developments across Blackpool and Lancashire, including the highly successful School Direct training programme in both mainstream and SEND and is a well-respected leader of education across the North West.