

Director Children's Services 6-month update, 31/10/2022

PDS Report

Virtual School

It has been a busy but successful year, including a highly positive OFSTED report and reflection on our work which stated that children under the remit of the virtual school. We have supported not only our Children Looked After cohort but also expanded to provide support for all pupils open to a social worker, following on from work last year with the pilot project with What Works.

Like our Social Care colleagues, the Virtual School supports a growing number of unaccompanied asylum seeker children. The Virtual School has appointed a dedicated officer to oversee this complex area of work to support this work. Despite the challenges of the last two years, the school's performance has remained good. A summary is provided below

Academic data summary:

- EYFS – 50% of the cohort made good learning development
- KS1 – 66% made ARE in writing, 33% made ARE in reading and maths.
- KS2 – 67% made ARE in reading with 1 securing greater depth, 56% made ARE in writing with 1 securing greater depth and 56% made ARE in maths. All of these results place us above the national and regional data.
- KS4 – Pupils achieving level 4 and above – English 33%, Maths 27% and both 27%. 27% achieved English and Maths at Grade 5 or above. 73% of KS4 pupils made expected progress.
- There have been no permanent exclusions and the number of children receiving one or more suspensions (fixed-term exclusions) has significantly reduced over the past four years as acknowledged by OFSTED Attendance remains strong at 90.64%

Schools Standards Board

The Schools Standards Board continues to meet to facilitate discussions on area-wide education priorities with the Local Authority and the Regional Directors Group. The next meeting is on the 15th of November. The agenda will focus on delivering the LA's Safety Valve Plan, along with information on the Poverty Proofing schools, early analysis, and information sharing around education performance.

St Johns Foundation

At the last PDS and previous ones, panel members have been advised of the joint work that the council is carrying out with the St. Johns Foundation to improve the education outcomes of disadvantaged pupils.

The last Lead member report highlighted the Improving Disadvantage Educational Outcomes Programme (IDEOP). This B&NES-wide approach to understanding and improving our disadvantage gap has started its discovery and research phase, led by our appointed partner, The Big Education Trust.

To support this work, all MATs have provided a named lead for this work and they will be meeting with the Big Education Trust over the next six months. This is an exciting project that will take a considered and ground-level look at the issue of our disadvantage gap in B&NES.

Children Services Workforce

We continue to experience significant demands within Children's Services with regard to increased complexity of family's presenting issues and this is likely to be exacerbated with the cost-of-living crisis.

Nationally, we are seeing significant workforce pressures in relation to the recruitment and retention of child protection social workers, and this is becoming increasingly evident within B&NES. We are working closely with HR colleagues to monitor and review this frequently to stabilise the workforce and minimise any impact this may have for our families and communities.

Early Help update

The Early Help offer in B&NES seeks to address the root causes of issues and to improve the outcomes and life chances of our most vulnerable children, young people and families by focusing on:

- Providing the right service at the right time.
- Developing a multi-agency integrated model, preventing extra familial harm and strengthening families by building on our Safer Options approach to serious youth violence and family support.
- Reducing teenagers requiring our care through improved family support with the launch of the reunification project and by providing support at the earliest opportunity.

In 2021 we remodelled the Early Help Services to support the demand at the front door, with Early Help staff working closely with Social Care Triage Team, this approach alongside the work of the multiagency Early Help Allocation Panel, ensures that the most effective response is given in a timely manner.

Early Help Services delivered by The Council

1. **Connecting Families Team (CFT)** works with children, young people, and families. Following a whole family assessment and action plan is drafted to meet their needs and support them to change their behaviour in order to achieve resilience, have good school attendance, gain work, have good wellbeing, and positive crime free lives within their community.
 - The CFT also provide mediation support for families. The CFT help family members: To reduce parental conflict between parents (that are either living together or separated).
 - The team have developed its offer to Afghan Refugee families in the last year to ensure that they have robust support in place as well.

2. **Bright Start Children's Centres (BSCC)** in Bath East and North East Somerset offer a range of activities and support services to help families with all aspects of parenting, either delivered within the Children Centre buildings or by a family support worker.
3. **Parenting offer**

Family Links Parenting Courses are run by the Connecting Families Team and the Bright Start Children's Centre Services in B&NES

Social Care: new extended duties Care Leavers

There are new statutory duties which came into force in April 2022 which require all Local Authorities to keep in touch and provide a service to care experienced young adults aged 21-25 years. These new duties mean that our Care Experienced service in B&NES will need to expand accordingly to provide a service to approximately 100 additional care experienced young adults.

The Care Experienced Team

In April 2022 a dedicated Care Experienced service was created within B&NES. This followed an independent audit of services. The Care Experienced Team (CET) works with young adults aged 18 – 24 years (up to their 25th birthday) who have or will have care leaver status upon their 18th birthday.

The team will support young adults to have every opportunity to engage in Education, Employment and Training, we hold monthly clinics to ensure there are clear pathways into education, employment or training tailored to their needs and in line with their own goals and ambitions. We support young adults to attend university and offer post 18 PEPs as an opt in service which the Virtual School oversee and provide input to ensure each young adult gets the support they need to achieve their potential.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) who have reached their 18th birthday will also be supported within the team. We will work alongside the Social Worker specialising in this area of work in the Children in Care Team in advance of their 18th birthday to support their transition to the CET.

In recent months the arrival of increased numbers of UASC is impacting on the capacity and work of the Team. Many of these children are arriving at 17 years plus and so will move into the Care Experienced Team shortly after being in the care of B&NES, often without their asylum claims processed and therefore without leave to remain. This brings additional responsibilities for the service.

The needs of Care Experienced young adults are increasingly complex, analysis shows that this is in part due to covid, EET opportunities, housing and mental health, alongside others. Many children are coming into care at a later age and so we have had less opportunity to provide support, stability and timely interventions, leading to additional needs at a later age. Although we are felt to be coming through the covid pandemic, the legacy for our Care Experienced young adults will be present for many years to come.

Mark Riddell visit update

Mark Riddell, the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers, visited B&NES on 11th October 2011. He originally visited in Oct/Nov 2018 and made a series of formal recommendations for our services to care experienced young adults and namely our Local Offer, a statutory requirement. This most recent visit was to scrutinise our progress, alongside the recommendations made by OFSTED in their inspection.

The visit was successful, and Mark commented on the good progress that B&NES has made since 2018. He agreed with the OFSTED judgement of 'Good'. Positive feedback was provided in relation to the work focusing on education, employment and training (EET), as a result of which we have seen an improvement in the number of care experienced young adults engaged in EET.

Recommendations were made in relation to B&NES housing offer for care experienced young adults, as well as services to meet their mental and emotional needs. These areas are being addressed within the Children's Transformation Programme (mental health/transitions projects) as well as collaborative working between CSC and Housing. Clear recommendations were made about the need for investment into the team to meet our statutory Extended Duties, and provide timely allocation of PAs. It is important to note that this recommendation was made by OFSTED also. Formal written feedback and recommendations for action will shortly be provided and it is planned that Mark will visit B&NES again in the next 12-18 months

Care Leaver Week

Care Leavers Week is a national event taking place from October 24-28 celebrating the achievements and contributions made by care experienced young adults. B&NES held events throughout the week for the care experienced young adults we support, including celebration evening and fun activities.

We also held a public art exhibition, involving art created by care experienced young adults from B&NES. The exhibition ran from October 25 to 27 at Bath's Victoria Art Gallery and had the theme 'Belonging'. The pieces were created specifically for Care Leavers Week and included poetry, 3D modelling, painting and photography. Care leavers week is an opportunity to focus on our care experienced young adults. These events supported Council staff, partner agencies and young adults coming together as a celebration.

Foster Care - recruitment and celebration

The Children's Transformation Programme includes a Fostering Recruitment and Retention project, which seeks to increase the numbers of in house foster carers, retain current fostering households, and improve on the support and training we provide to carers. An invest to save programme was agreed enabling us to

- Employ a marketing apprentice
- Commission the services of a marketing company to aid in recruitment
- Build capacity into the team to enable support and supervision of carers and staff
- Review of fostering allowances, moving to a skill-based scheme, rather than age related allowances.

The project has been successful, and we have seen a rise in the number of foster carer households in B&NES. However, this has been offset in part, by a rise in the number of children coming into the care of the Local Authority. The rise in care numbers is a national issue and B&NES continues to be in line with our statistical neighbours and below national averages.

The review of fostering allowances and implementation of a skills-based scheme has been welcomed by our carers. The commission of a marketing agency has been successful and a key part of our recruitment strategy. We have learnt much from the agency and retain all rights to the material they have produced.

The project also included the development of our Fostering Families service, one of a kind nationally. This provides a foster carer to the child and their parents/family members, enabling the child to remain at home. The foster carer will act as an extended family member and transitional attachment figure for the child's primary carers. The aim of this service is to avoid children coming into care.

The Fostering families service has shown good outcomes with no new entries into care for children supported. We have also seen some children being stepped down from a child protection plan and therefore no longer on the edge of care.

Youth Justice

Following a consultation with children and professionals, the Youth Offending Service is re-naming itself the Youth Justice Service. This recognises the importance of taking a 'child first' approach and whilst the statutory requirement to prevent youth offending remains in place and is a priority in all our work, retaining the word 'offending' in the organisation's name would not have reflected our focus on children's holistic needs. Use of the word 'justice' also reflects our commitment to those harmed by children and our work to offer them involvement in restorative responses. We are continuing to explore how best to involve children in influencing strategic leaders as well as operational staff. To this end, a young person remaining in voluntary contact with us after his 18th birthday recently attended our strategic Board to describe and discuss his experiences of accommodation. It led to specific actions for strategic leaders to follow up and report back on.

Violence Reduction

Despite tragic and serious knife assaults in recent weeks, this continues to be an area that sees comparatively low levels of serious violence and there is strong partnership commitment to addressing exploitation and conflicts that pose a risk to children, families and the wider community. Recognising the importance of raising awareness and encouraging children to talk about their concerns, we are collating information about all the workshops currently being offered in education settings and are procuring more through the community fund.

The partnership continues to deliver against its work plan, including procuring a longer contract for delivery of detached youth work in areas of concern and we will be introducing a longer-term mentoring offer for those at risk of being caught up in serious violence. We are also exploring the nature of women and girls' involvement in serious violence and have

completed a questionnaire consultation with professionals which suggested there is a continuing level of concern although few come through to the attention of the Youth Justice Service.

We are now procuring a piece of work to understand children's own experiences and perceptions of what is happening and are also reviewing what support is available for them as part of developing a serious violence 'pathway.' The multi-agency Partnership for Reducing Exploitation and Serious Violence continues to meet monthly to share information about individuals, networks and places of concern, gauge our shared level of concern and strengthen the offer of support where possible. This now includes allocation time through the two new Police Constables being attached to the Violence Reduction Unit. We are currently taking stock of the impact of this work.

Planning is underway, in partnership with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, for the implementation of the serious violence duty and we are beginning to compile information for our next strategic needs assessment.