

Cllr Adam Wilkinson, Lead Member for Children and Young Peoples Services and Cllr Sarah Courtney, Interim Lead Member for Children and Young People's Services – report to Council February 2022

Early Years, Schools and COVID

Schools and other education and childcare settings continue to work under considerable pressure. The Omicron variant has led to a significant increase in the number of outbreaks and ongoing disruption to education across the Borough. The local advice that had been in place to support measures above those in the national guidance was removed from 27 January 2022, as national restrictions changed. The Safe Education and Childcare Group continues to meet weekly and Public Health colleagues continue to support schools and settings on an individual basis.

Attendance based on available data for week ending 28 January 2022 was 87%, an increase of 2% from the previous week, but still lower than attendance in December 2021.

Secondary schools continue to work closely with Public Health and the School Immunisation Team to support the delivery of the 12-15 vaccination programme, with second doses being offered in school settings. Vaccinations for the 5-11 age group are being planned and it is likely these will be delivered through the primary care network rather than schools.

Education Recovery Plan: Despite education continuing to be disrupted, work is ongoing to support children, schools and settings in education recovery, closing inequality gaps and supporting mental health and wellbeing. All Calderdale schools, including academies, have received additional funding through the self-improving school cluster model this year and each cluster is part of the steering group, co-producing the Education Recovery Plan whilst also working on its own key priorities.

I am delighted that a bid to the Education Endowment Foundation for a two-year research project was successful. The project will work to close gaps in literacy for disadvantaged children in up to 30 primary schools.

Eight primary schools are taking part in the Heartstone's Story Circle project, working with local poets, dancers, artists, musicians, historians and sculptors. The Literacy based project also deals with issues of racism and prejudice, generating discussion and debate as well as developing literacy skills. The work will build up to a new national Heartstone Odyssey Book Festival to take place in July 2022 involving schools across the North West region.

Mental Health and Wellbeing: This is a strand in the Education Recovery Plan. We now have 48 schools and post-16 settings involved in the Calderdale Mental Health Support Team (MHST), with mental health professionals working directly in the schools. Calderdale has also run the Mental Health Services and Schools and Colleges Link Programme, which is open to all schools not part of the MHST. Funded by the DfE and endorsed by NHSE, it brings together education and mental health

professionals, facilitated by the Anna Freud Centre, it is aligned to and supports 'Thrive', delivered by the Open Minds Partnership.

Wicked Issues Forum: Over 80 people from a range of partners attended the session on 24 January 2022 to hear from keynote speakers and to consider the challenges and opportunities to improve inclusion in Calderdale. A working party will be developing an action plan and reporting to the Calderdale Partnership School Improvement Board.

Early Years: The work to develop the Early Years Strategy continues and the draft of the Speech Language and Communication Pathway was presented to the Starting Well Board in January. This builds on the work for the Calderdale Family Journey and will now be fully developed as a co-produced pathway to support speech and language development at universal, targeted and specialist levels.

The Early Years Childcare Sufficiency Assessment was published in January 2022. Despite the difficult trading conditions and uncertain parental demand caused by the pandemic, the Local Authority is currently able to meet its statutory duties in ensuring it has sufficient childcare. In 2021 there was a net loss of 84 childcare places (316 opened against 400 closed). This is an improvement from last year's net loss of 384 places. It is important to note that not all these are COVID-19 related.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities: The restructure of the Specialist Inclusion Team has been completed without the need for any compulsory redundancies. The Service Manager for Inclusion and SEND, Ben Allchin, left Calderdale in January 2022. A highly experienced Interim Service Manager, David Graham, has been appointed and is providing strong leadership to ensure development work continues.

School Place Planning: As demand continues to increase for specialist provision, plans are being developed for further ASD resourced provision at Rastrick High School and to expand the post-16 provision at Ravenscliffe High School, Spring Hall site. Proposals are also being considered for a new through special school sited within North Halifax which would also include provision for children and young people with high needs in Social Emotional and Mental Health.

The Department for Education have not yet confirmed the site for the new secondary free school to serve the Brighouse area. Whilst the opening date is also still to be confirmed, it will potentially be 2024. Plans to develop two additional 2-form entry primary schools also in the Brighouse area, had been paused after the development of the garden suburbs had been pushed back in the Local Plan. It now seems likely that there will be a need for those schools earlier than anticipated so work will recommence, starting with inviting expressions of interest from schools in the area who wish to expand with split site provision.

Discussions are on-going with Trinity Multi-Academy Trust about the feasibility of expanding the Trinity Academy Halifax site on to the land at the rear of the academy, owned by the Council, to add further secondary school capacity in the North Halifax area.

Whilst we are preparing for growth in some parts of the Borough, many other schools, in particular small primary schools in the Calder Valley, are experiencing falling roll trends and a number of schools are working with Education and Inclusion Services to explore options to support their viability.

Operation Warm Welcome: Plans are underway to admit the 20 school-aged children of the families staying at The Wool Merchant Hotel. Services are looking at additional support to ensure the children and young people can make the best possible start in education in Calderdale.

Ofsted inspections in education: There have been a number of Section 8 inspections, which do not lead to a change in judgement. St Andrew's Junior School had a very strong outcome, remaining Good, and the report stated that there was enough evidence to suggest had it been a Section 5 inspection it could have been judged Outstanding. Lightcliffe CE Primary School also remained Good and Lightcliffe Academy had a Section 8 monitoring visit in which it was deemed leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures. Luddendenfoot Academy remains as Outstanding and Heptonstall Primary School remains as Good although evidence suggests they may not be that high and both will have full inspections next time. In Section 5 full inspections, Luddenden CE School remains as Requires Improvement although the areas for improvement in the last inspection have all been addressed. Triangle CE Primary School went from Outstanding (from 2007) to Requires Improvement overall with some aspects of Good. Two schools, Brighouse High and Calder Learning Trust, had inspections deferred due to the impact of COVID-19 on staffing.

Healthy Holidays

6000 places were available as part of the Healthy Holidays Calderdale Winter Offer, which took place during the December 2021 school holidays. The programme was delivered at 33 venues across the Borough by 28 providers. Calderdale Council is working with local schools, private, voluntary and community organisations to deliver these clubs. The Winter Programme involved a range of wonderful activities, including North Pole Adventures, festive feasts, pantomime trips and even a chilly canoe paddle on the reservoir. 11 Calderdale schools were used as venues during the Winter Programme.

The total number of HAF funded places accessed by eligible children over the Winter Programme was 2184. A 'HAF funded place' means attendance at one four-hour session. Included in this figure, 165 free places were accessed by children and young people with special education needs and disabilities (SEND). The programme also provided places for children and young people not in receipt of benefits-related free school meals but are considered by the Local Authority as vulnerable, or in need of this provision. 369 of these places were accessed during the winter school holidays. The Winter Programme reported 893 returning eligible children from the Summer Programme.

Whilst HAF funding does not include half-term provision, work is underway with partners to establish a more limited and alternatively funded activity programme for February 2022 Half Term.

The Healthy Holidays Calderdale Programme will continue across Easter, Summer, and Christmas school holidays throughout 2022 funded by the Department for Education.

Early Intervention and Safeguarding

Supporting families

We have now received confirmation of our funding allocation for Supporting Families (formerly Troubled Families) the funding has been confirmed for another three years and this years funding has shown an 11% uplift from the previous year with slightly less outcomes to achieve which is welcomed.

Front door demand

Demand at the front door service remains high with the Multi Agency Screening Team receiving 1412 contacts for the month of October 2021, 1388 contacts for the month of November 2021, 1232 contacts for the month of December 2021 and 690 for the first two weeks in January 2022. Children's Assessment Team have completed 1161 Single Assessment since 01/04/2021 of whom 99% within recommended timescale. In addition the Children Assessment Team have completed 350 Section 47 enquiries since 1 April 2021 of which 96% have been completed within 5 working days. This evidences that despite the continued high demand performance within the front door remains very high.

Front Door Health Check Follow-up visit

Front Door Health Check follow-up visit, which was led by Mel John-Ross (Director of Children's Services, Barnsley) on 21 October 2021. The feedback from the visit was very positive, amongst other things Mel reported within their letter that there is now a mature approach to managing the risk and demand in Calderdale with rates of Section 47 activity, Initial Child Protection Case Conferences and Child in Need cases falling to a point where they are much more in line with national averages and closer to our aspirations. They also reported that Early Help is now a significant strength in Calderdale and the partnership arrangements with schools for safeguarding and visiting vulnerable and absent pupils, have clearly safeguarded children. In addition, child and family voice is well utilised and this was noted as strength as is the family's history. Mel went further to say that there are strong, embedded systems and multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for Domestic Violence and contextual safeguarding and partners are playing their part. Quality Assurance is embedded across the system and there is strong engagement of senior managers and support from politicians.

Children's home's inspections

Our Children's Residential Services are going from strength to strength, with all our four homes being inspected by Ofsted in this reporting period and all showing significant improvement. Three have had full inspections and all received a grading of 'Outstanding' one has had an interim inspection where no grade is awarded but it was found to have "improved effectiveness".

Linden Brook Short Breaks Disability Service have retained an 'Outstanding' Judgement for the past four inspections and have successfully overcome challenges in relation to COVID-19, remaining connected to the wider service, including families. The inspector found that the home provided high standards of care in which young people are thriving and are making exceptional progress.

Hebble Lodge has retained an 'Outstanding' Judgement for the past three inspections, more recently under new management. The inspector found that the home has overcome challenges presented by young people, demonstrating the ability to address setbacks swiftly, it provides a safe place for young people to thrive and benefit from new experiences. Key strengths were centred around the home's partnership work and links with families that creates a foundation for developing positive relationships, and also supporting information captured through the young people's Life Story work.

Cousin Lane Childrens Home have progressed from 'Requires Improvement to be Good' to 'Outstanding'. This is a significant achievement for the home particularly given the COVID context. The inspector found that the home employs a systemic approach in operational practices and equally along with all other homes is strongly connected with the wider services. The strength in relationships has been recognised as the home's greatest strength amongst many others. The Manager and staff team have created a safe space for all young people not only to thrive socially, but also with more formal learning through study. Consistency has been the key to the home's success, the home has stabilised, educated and empowered young people to develop skills that will support the transition through adolescence into independence.

Field Heights Children's Home has recently undertaken an interim inspection (no judgement is awarded on an interim inspection) the home is currently graded at 'Requires Improvement to be Good'. However the inspector found that the home has 'Improved Effectiveness' clearly demonstrating the skills, abilities and ambition to develop a strong service for young people. The Management and staff team demonstrated the skills to manage any given situation, responding swiftly, professionally and in a manner that ensures that the young people were kept front and centre. The information shared through the inspector highlighted the aspirations and commitment to young people, care plans that were robust and that were consistent with multi-agency agreements and high levels of care, love and support; the team provides a space where young people feel safe.

LGA peer review of Corporate Parenting arrangements

The priorities for Children's Services in 2022 include a full refresh of the Calderdale Corporate Parenting offer to Children Looked After and Care Leavers. Ensuring Elected Members and all employees of the Council hold Children in Care at the heart of what they do, this is key to an effective Corporate Parenting offer. The refresh will look at all aspects of the service and how the different departments interact with one another to support children. The refresh will also look at what Children's Services do now, including governance such as the Corporate Parenting Panel and the interface of elected members with front line practice; the voice of Children in Care and Care Leavers including Right2Voice, communication with SLT and visibility of the child's voice across decision making. Additionally, we will be looking at how our key partners

support us with our corporate parenting offer and how they enhance the experiences of children in care and care leavers.

To help with the refresh of Corporate Parenting arrangements we have signed up to a peer review conducted by the LGA of Corporate Parenting arrangements. The Local Government Association (LGA) have announced a support offer to Councils to help them to evaluate their Corporate Parenting offer; this includes a peer review with evaluation, recommendations for making improvements and a training offer (if needed). Details of the offer can be found here <https://www.local.gov.uk/corporate-parenting-lga-support-development-and-training-offer>. We've had an initial meeting with the LGA and agreed that we would like to work together and we will be drafting the terms of the work at an initial meeting in February 2022. We hope to reach a point of recommendations to bring to Scrutiny/ Corporate Parenting Panel during the Summer of 2022.

Addition to Lead Member's Report

Ash Green: Ash Green Community Primary School suffered a devastating fire at its upper site on the evening of Tuesday 1 February 2022. An intruder was arrested at the scene and there is a criminal investigation underway. The school is at the heart of the community and the impact of this event has been significant for the children and their families, staff and the people of Mixenden. The response from the school, led by Mungo Sheppard, Headteacher, has been magnificent, as has the work of the emergency services, local people and Council Officers. Whilst one part of the school has been completely destroyed, quick action by the Fire Service and very effective fire doors limited the area affected and the largest part of the building appears to be relatively undamaged, apart from the smell of smoke. Within hours, the school had plans in place for the care, support and education of all children; in less than 24 hours they had worked with the insurance loss adjuster and Council Officers to plan for the demolition of the damaged block, arrange modular buildings and to undertake work to ensure the safety, security and re-opening of the undamaged section. The local community is being supported, with the Holy Nativity Church being open for people to come together. Work is underway to have all children back in full-time face to face education after half term, from Monday 28 February 2022. It is hoped this will be back in the least affected part of the school, with interim arrangements using all available teaching spaces there and at the lower site whilst modular buildings are installed. There have been numerous offers of help and support from across Calderdale schools and other organisations. Whilst this has been a devastating event causing considerable sorrow and grief, it has also highlighted once again the real resilience and kindness of Calderdale people.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the Headteacher, all the staff and Governors at the school, to all the staff at the Council, the emergency services, and the wonderful people of Mixenden, North Halifax and beyond who have worked selflessly to minimise the disruption to the education and lives of Ash Green School's children and their families.