



## Public Accounts Select Committee

### Children's Social Care and Budget Pressures

**Date:** 26 September 2024

**Key decision:** No.

**Class:** Part 1

**Ward(s) affected:** All

**Contributors:**

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### Outline and recommendations

This report seeks to provide Members of the Public Accounts Select Committee with an update on the current situation regarding the Children's Social Care budget and the pressures that the service is currently under

## 1. Summary

- 1.1 The last report to PASC in March 2023 introduced the context of the Children's Social Care Division (CSC) in the Children and Young Peoples Directorate. It referred to the improvement journey the service had been on since having been judged by the Ofsted regulator in 2019 as 'requiring improvement'. Since then, in December 2023 children's social care services were subject to an Ofsted ILACS inspection and is judged to now be providing 'Good' services in all areas.
- 1.2 Through 2023-24 CSC has stabilised the workforce position, but the legacy of the pandemic, inflationary pressures, the cost of living crisis and now the increasing costs of placements for children and young people (CYP) in care place exceptional pressure on budgets. With upward trajectory on demand for children's social work services and most critically, considerable increases in the cost of externally commissioned placements persists. This is a national issue regularly reported in the press and most recently highlighted as a pressure on council funding by the Local Government Association (LGA).
- 1.3 This report is an update on the position on CSC spend, reported to PASC in March 2023, in addition it provides a response to the questions posed by the committee (listed below) and sets out the actions under way across the Children and Young People's Directorate to manage and reduce spend in social care services for CYP.
- 1.4 **Questions raised by the chair of the PASC in July 2024**  
Prior to this committee meeting the Chair noted a number of questions that he would want Children's Services to respond to. These questions are listed below and report is structured to answer each of the questions
  - What are the main drivers of costs in the process?
  - What measures have been taken to control and reduce costs?
  - What internal systems are in place to support the commissioning process and ensure value for money is achieved?
  - What are the current systems in place for procurement and commissioning of social care packages?
  - What additional measures are being investigated?
  - What measures have been considered and rejected?
  - What reforms of the market are necessary to control costs and how could these be achieved?

## 2. Recommendations

Members are asked to note and comment upon the contents of this report.

## 3. Policy Context

- 3.1 Section 22G of the Children's Act 1989 places a legal duty on Local Authorities to take steps to secure, as far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for CYP in care and care leavers within their local authority area. The Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children (2010) states that local authorities should have embedded plans, as part of their commissioning processes and through partnership working, to meet this duty.

## 4. Introduction

- 4.1 The Children's Social Care (CSC) division is one of three that form the Children and Young People's Directorate. Social care services for children and young people (CYP) are delivered across all three divisions, but the majority of social care services sit within CSC division and significantly for this report, the care and placements budget sits in CSC.
- 4.2 The overall budget and spend position across the Children and Young People's Directorate is shown in Table 1 below, based on Period 4 (2024/25).

Table 1

CYP Directorate 2024/25	Net Budget	Net Forecast	Period 4 Variance
	£m	£m	£m
Children's Social Care Services	64.5	74.6	10.1
Education & Early Years Services	19.6	21.5	1.9
Families, Quality and Commissioning	9.3	10.0	0.7
Executive Director, Provisions & Reserves	0.5	0.5	0.0
<b>CYP Directorate Subtotal</b>	<b>93.9</b>	<b>106.6</b>	<b>12.7</b>
Central Schools Services Block (DSG)	-2.4	-0.6	1.8
<b>CYP Directorate Total</b>	<b>91.5</b>	<b>106.0</b>	<b>14.5</b>

- 4.3 After the March 2023 PASC, the table below was provided showing the CSC budget and outturn since the improvement programme commenced in 2018. This moves from the net outturn position reported to Mayor and Cabinet as well as Public Accounts Select Committee to a 'gross' outturn by adding back the budgeted level of income and budget for services that have moved out of CSC into FQC, ensuring a like for like comparison across multiple financial years. This has been updated to show the forecast position for 2024/25 based on Period 4.

Table 2

CSC Outturn	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25 as at P4
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
<b>Net reported Outturn</b>	-	-	-	48.4	57.5	69.0	74.6
One off funding	-	-	-	10.8	0	0	0
Income removed (historic budgeted level)	-	-	-	3.8	3.6	3.6	6.3
Adjustments for services moved to FQC	-	-	-	-	1.8	1.3	2.9
<b>Gross Outturn</b>	<b>59.4</b>	<b>57.1</b>	<b>61.7</b>	<b>63.0</b>	<b>62.9</b>	<b>73.9</b>	<b>83.8</b>
Gross Budget (GF, SCG, Budgeted income)	48.5	46.9	55.3	55.8	57.4	59.0	73.7
Variance	10.9	10.2	6.4	7.2	5.5	14.9	10.1
Covid Support	0.0	0.0	-3.5	-3.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
One off Reserve Funding	0.0	-7.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	-2.16
Corporate Funding	-4.0	0.0	0.0	-3.0	-1.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Revised Variance</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>14.9</b>	<b>7.9</b>
<i>CSC Overspend Reduction Measures</i>					3.6	2.5	

4.4 Table 2 shows despite rising demand, prior to 2023/24 the overall spend was relatively flat. We then had a sharp rise in 2023/24 where spend increased significantly and the projection for 2024/25 based on Periods 1- 4 is that there will be a further increase this year.

Table 3

CSC Budget breakdown	2023/24			2024/25		
	Net Budget	Net outturn	Variance	Net Budget	Net Forecast	Period 4 Variance
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
<b>Workforce</b>	20.3	22.0	1.6	21.4	21.4	0.0
<b>Section 17 – CYP in Need</b>	1.3	2.6	1.3	1.2	2.6	1.4
<b>Section 17 – NRPF</b>	2.6	2.9	0.2	2.6	2.9	0.2
<b>Other – Organisational</b>	2.4	0.6	-1.8	2.1	0.6	-1.5
<b>Income</b>	-3.6	-3.6	-0.0	-6.3	-6.3	0.0
<b>Care (previously referred to as Placements budget) TOTAL</b>	<b>31.1</b>	<b>44.5</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>43.5</b>	<b>53.4</b>	<b>9.9</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>54.1</b>	<b>69.0</b>	<b>14.8</b>	<b>64.5</b>	<b>74.6</b>	<b>10.1</b>

4.5 Table 3 shows how the CSC Budget is now structured. In 2023/24 the budget was restructured to improve transparency and reduce miscoding, to strengthen financial management. Historically the budget relating to all the costs associated with care and permanence was referred to as the 'Placements' budget, this has been changed because the description is misleading and the budget was too big to be able to analyse the spend.

4.6 The 'placements' budget is now referred to as the 'Care' budget. The 'Care' budget has 5 subsections showing how all the care costs are broken down. See Table 4.1:

- Care Support– e.g. CYP savings, supervised contact, transport.
- Care Placements – cost of all types of placements for CYP in care 0-18 yrs old.
- Permanence – financial support to carers and CYP in arrangements that are being financially supported, these are often kinship care but not exclusively e.g. CYP under Special Guardianship Orders and some Adoption costs.
- Care Leaver Support – all financial entitlements referenced in the Local Offer.
- Care Leaver Accommodation – Housing Pathway for 18 – 25 year olds.

Table 4.1

Care budget (previously known as placements budget)	2023/24			2024/25		
	Net Budget	Net outturn	Variance	Net Budget	Net Forecast	Period 4 Variance
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Care - Support	1.1	1.6	0.6	1.1	1.6	0.6
Care – Placements	20.9	31.7	10.8	31.0	39.4	8.4
Care – Permanence	4.7	5.2	0.6	5.2	5.0	-0.1
Care Leaver Support	0.5	1.8	1.3	0.5	1.8	1.3
Care Leaver Accommodation	4.0	4.2	0.2	4.0	3.7	-0.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31.1</b>	<b>44.5</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>43.5</b>	<b>53.4</b>	<b>9.9</b>

4.7 The main driver for increased spend across the Children & Young People's directorate is the cost of placements for CYP in care, followed by permanence.

#### 4.8 The workforce budget

In 2021/22 to respond to the upward rise demand in the preceding years, additional staffing was introduced to the safeguarding service and expanded the Meliot family centre to 'in-house' services previously commissioned, to strengthen our preventative approach to CYP on the edge of care. These changes are reflected in the spend and 0.8m variance for that financial year.

4.9 Through 2022 post pandemic, we experienced an exceptionally challenging period in relation to staffing, with a high number of unfilled vacancies. This explains the lower outturn for workforce spend in 2022/23.

4.10 In 2023/24 the workforce budget increased by £1.6m on account of a £1.8m inflation - pay award for the two previous years (2022/23 and 2023/24) and a reduction of £200k for staff transfers to FQC and some savings that were applied. The increased spend in this year was a result of an improved staffing position with fewer vacancies and some temporary additional staff to prepare for the anticipated Ofsted inspection, which took place in December 2023.

4.11 In 2024/25 the £1.1m increase in the workforce budget reflects;

- + £0.2m inflation – pay award,
- + £1.5m budget rightsizing, to reflect the cost of the establishment
- - £1.6 transfer of staff from CSC to FQC and
- + £0.9 grossing up of the budget with regular, reliable income that is received through central government grants (and Home Office). E.g. Home

office funding for UASC and Department of Education Section 31 funding for extended care leaver duties. This is not new additional money, it has been budgeted to provide more transparency on the workforce costs.

- 4.12 As at June 2024 the CSC workforce was 80% permanent, with vacancies mostly filled using locum social work staff at an additional cost of c£300k pa. However, following the rightsizing exercise, CSC is forecast to stay within its workforce budget this year through a combination of:
- Temporary Ofsted preparation staff being released.
  - A 5% vacancy factor being maintained.
  - An expected reduction of reliance on agency staff by the success of our Student and NQSW (Newly Qualified Social Worker) workforce Academy, to recruit more permanent staff.
  - The realignment of safeguarding service workforce, utilising new permissions in statutory guidance (Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023) allowing for ‘children in need’ to be allocated to a lead professional that is not a qualified social worker.
  - Testing new and more efficient ways of working through the Families First Pathfinder programme.

4.13 **Department for Education (DfE) Families First Pathfinder**

In March 2024 we were successful in our bid to be part of this national programme, Lewisham (along with 9 other local authorities) was awarded £3.3m to trial new ways of delivering family help and child protection for the potential roll out across the rest of the country. In July a report went to CYP Select Committee outlining the programme.

- 4.14 In conjunction, the Working Together to Safeguard Children statutory guidance was revised in December 2023, enabling local authorities to diversify their workforce to work with CYP ‘in need’. As it stands this programme will come to an end in March 2025. It is our understanding that the DfE will extend this programme over a longer period, therefore reducing our current reliance on short term and agency contracts to deliver it.

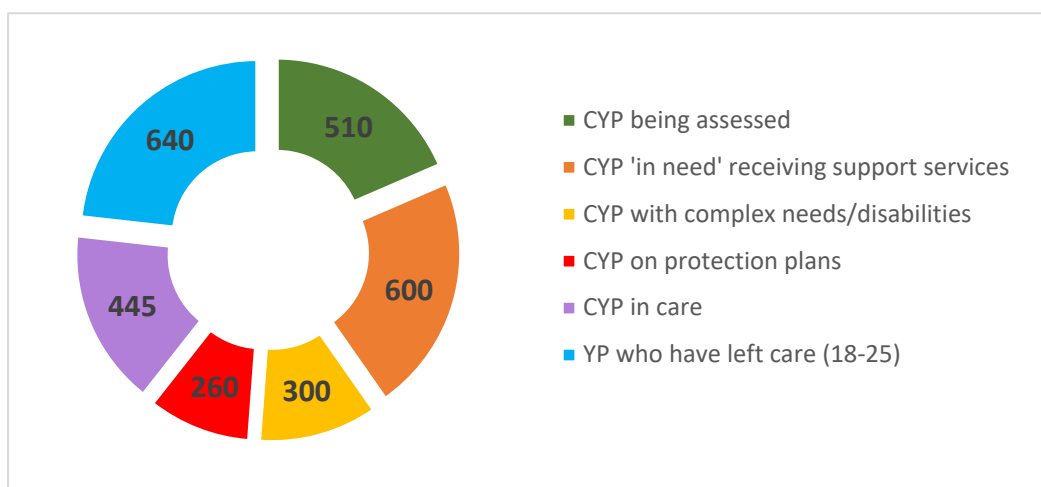
- 4.15 Through the measures above, we have forecast an anticipated overall reduction on workforce spend of £520k over two years.

Table 5

<b>Workforce Budget</b>	<b>Net Budget £m</b>	<b>Net outturn £m</b>	<b>Variance £m</b>
<b>2021/22</b>	18.7	19.5	0.8
<b>2022/23</b>	18.7	18.2	-0.5
<b>2023/24</b>	20.3	22.0	1.6
<b>2024/25</b>	21.4	21.4	0.0

## 5 The main drivers of costs

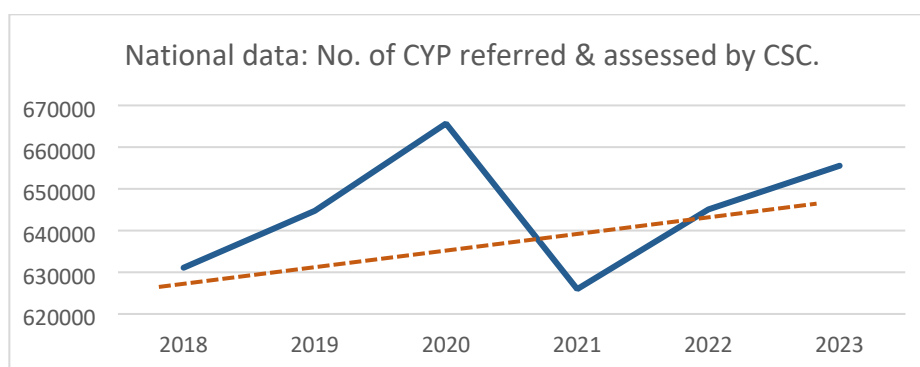
5.12 As at August 2024 CSC services are working within the region of 2750 – 2800 CYP at any one time, most of whom are not in care.



### 5.13 Children and young people (CYP) in need

The graph in 5.6 shows the no. of CYP referred to CSC\* in 2018/19 increased from 2,361 to 3,242 in 2022/23, up 37%. In 2023/24 demand continued to increase by a further 5% from the previous year (44% up since 2018/19). Based on current referral rates for quarter one, Lewisham CSC anticipates between 3500-4000 CYP to be referred during 2024/25.

5.3 The upward trend of increasing need in Lewisham is not out of step with the national position.



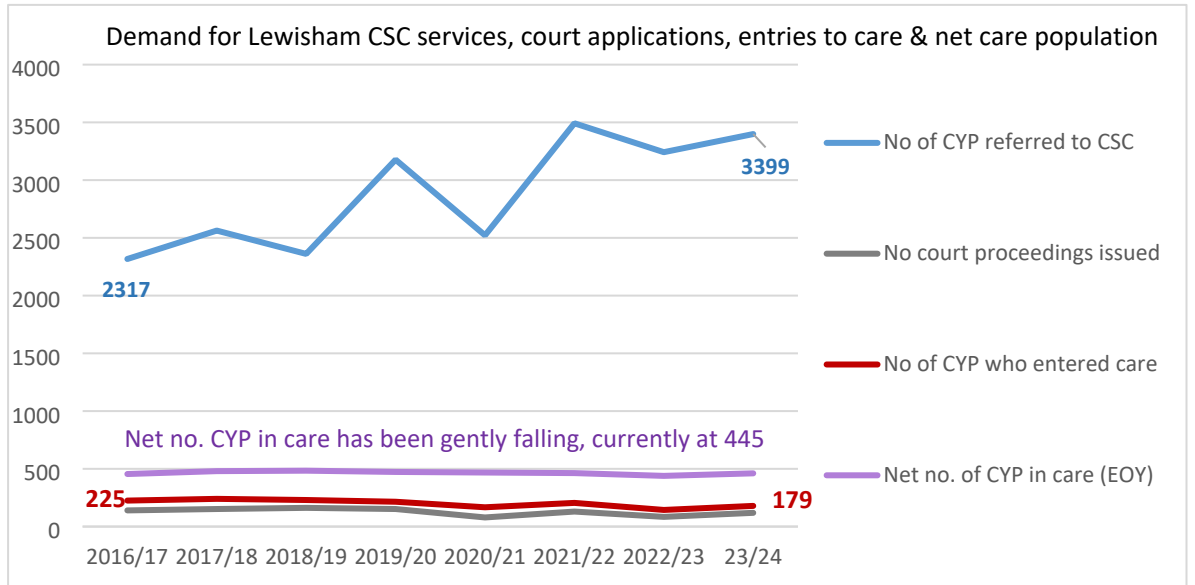
Data source: Dept. for Education. Outcomes for children in need. 2023

5.4 In the national context, with rising demand for support and protection services locally, Lewisham has managed the impact through the CSC improvement programme. Since 2019 we have invested in prevention, upskilled and stabilised the workforce, improved practice, strengthened management oversight and embedded a practice framework (Signs of Safety) to change the culture of risk management.

- 5.5 For the 1400 CYP and families being assessed, supported as 'in need' or safeguarded with protection plans, at any one time. The prevention of harm activity is largely delivered by the social workers and family practitioners within the workforce. There is little in the way of additional externally commissioned social care packages, with the exception of specialist services for CYP with disabilities. This is why we have a strong focus and investment in our workforce development, because a skilled and stable workforce is the best way to help and protect CYP, preventing more of them to stay safely within their families and communities.
- 5.6 The impact of the whole scale system reform and the Meliot Family Centre expansion in 2021-22 to create a broader range of intensive tailored preventive services to the most vulnerable families and CYP on the edge of coming into care has achieved the following:
- Improved the quality of services being provided from that which 'Requires Improvement' to 'Good' (See Ofsted ILACS inspection outcome December 2025\*). <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50238709>
  - Successfully reduced reliance on more expensive agency staff with permanent staffing rising from 64% in 2018 to 80% in 2024.
  - The in-housing of services into Meliot that we previously spot purchased improved the quality and the impact on CYP and reduce spend in the Section 17 Child in Need budget, see Table 6.
  - We have significantly reduced the rate of CYP subject to family court proceedings and nearly halved the rate of CYP entering care (See Table 5), with its associated cost avoidance (See Para 5.9)
- 5.7 In 2018/19 the rate of CYP needing to be subject to family court proceedings and coming into care as the graph below (Para 5.10) and table 5 shows. In 2016/17 9.7% of CYP referred to CSC became looked after in care, that trend continued until 2019/20 after the practice changes were introduced in the improvement programme. By 2023/24 it had nearly halved to 5.2%.
- 5.8 If practice in CSC had continued as it had been, with a lack of investment in prevention and the workforce, with high caseloads and insufficient management oversight. Care entries would most likely have remained at the rate of over 9% of all referrals. This would have meant an additional 133 CYP would have entered care in 2023/24, in addition to the actual 179 that did.
- 5.9 As care placements are the most significant cost driver in CSC, it then follows that lower numbers of CYP entering and in care means less spend. A moderate prediction of the full year effect placement cost of the net difference of 4.5% (No.133 CYP) is between £8-12m.
- 5.10 A stable, skilled, supported workforce with manageable caseloads has improved practice has led to stronger preventative support for CYP in need. This has had a financial benefit, avoiding even more cost increases that would otherwise have happened in Lewisham.



5.11



\*Note: Figures adjust the overall no. of referrals received in CSC by the re-referral rate, to identify the no. of CYP referred at least once over the year.

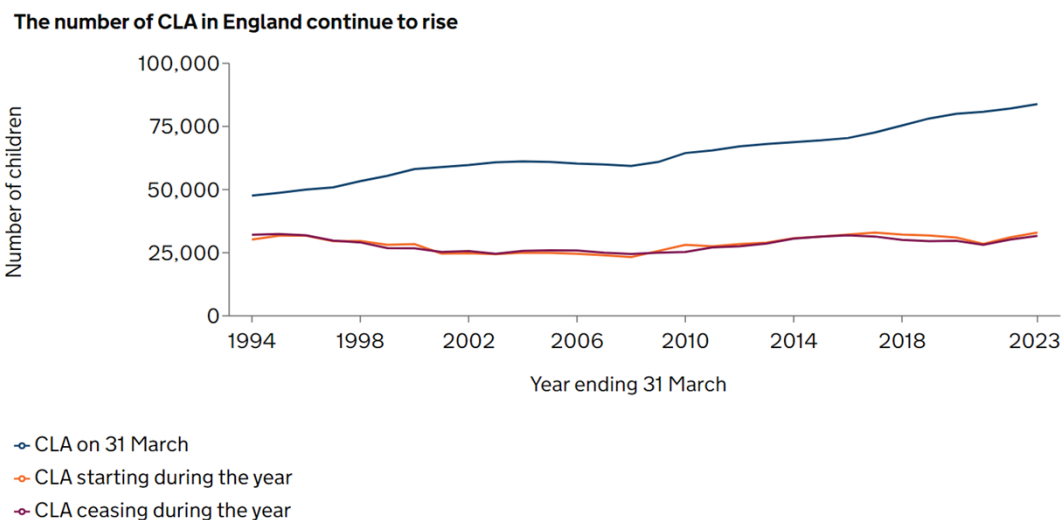
5.12 Table 5

	CYP subject of court proceedings as a proportion of CYP referred.	CYP entered care as a proportion of CYP referred.
2018/19	6.8%	9.7%
2023/24	3.5% (down by 3.3%)	5.2% (down by 4.5%)

5.13 Table 6

The Section 17 Children in Need Budget (excludes NRPF)	2021/22		2022/23		2023/24	
	Net budget	Net outturn	Net budget	Net outturn	Net budget	Net outturn
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
	1.4	3.7	1.3	3.0	1.3	2.6

## 6 Children and young people in care, young adults who are care leavers and the cost associated with care placements



Data source: *Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting year 2023 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK* ([explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk))

- 6.4 It is unsurprising that following the national upward trend of referrals to CSC, the rate of CYP entering care and the net no. of CYP in care is also rising nationally. Whilst Lewisham bucks this trend it does have the legacy of a historically high rate of CYP in care and care leavers. Lewisham has the 5<sup>th</sup> highest rate of both cohorts in London. This arises from the relatively young age profile of the borough, combined with high levels of need and the historic lack of investment in prevention and social care services that were risk averse and in need of improvement.
- 6.5 The largest cost driver for CYP services is the spend associated with CYP in care and post care. We currently have 445 CYP in care, 640 Care Leavers (18-25) and a further 280 CYP who were previously in care but are now being supported (financially and with services) under Special Guardianship or Care Arrangement Orders. All of these cohorts have care related costs, but the key cost driver is placements for our CYP in care (0-18) as illustrated in Table 4.
- 6.6 Despite numbers of CYP entering care and the net number in care falling in Lewisham, over the last two years the cost of care placements is rising placing significant pressure on budgets.
- 6.7 CYP in care live in a range of different placements, similar to other Boroughs, three quarters of our CYP live in alternative family-based arrangements, either with Connected Carers (Kinship fostering), Lewisham foster carers or foster carers commissioned through independent fostering agencies (IFAs). The remaining quarter live in either residential care and semi-independent placements. Approximately half of all our 16/17 year olds live in semi-independent housing. Table 7 shows the proportionate spread of care placements across the care population and how it has shifted over the last two years.

Table 7

Type of placement for CYP in care by %	Aug-22	Jan-23	Jul-23	Jan-24	Jul-24	DIFFERENCE Aug 22–Jul 24
Lewisham Foster Carer	20	21	20	21	21	↑ 1%
Connected Carer/Parent	14	14	14	14	14	→ 0%
Independent Foster Carer (IFA)	45	46	46	39	37	↓ -8%
Residential/Secure	9	8	8	11	14	↑ 5%
Parent & baby residential unit	2	2	2	3	5	↑ 3%
Semi independent/supported	7	7	7	7	7	→ 0%
Youth Offender Institution	0.7	0.9	0.5	0.2	0.7	→ 0%
Adoption	0.2	0.4	0.9	1.6	0.7	→ 0%

- 6.8 When comparing with the national figures, Lewisham has 67% of CYP in care aged over 10 years old, the national average is 64% and Lewisham has 5% more 16-17 year olds. An analysis of CYP entering care through 2021 - 2023 found 43% of CYP entering care are aged between 0 – 10 years old. 57% are 11 – 17 years old with 36% aged 16 or 17. When you exclude unaccompanied children seeking asylum (UASC) who are typically 16 or 17 years old on entry to care, it shows 50% of CYP entering care are aged 11 – 17 years old, with 24% aged over 14.
- 6.9 Earlier permanence planning now means that most CYP entering care do not spend the entire childhood remaining in care. 40% of CYP who enter care leave within 12 months. Nearly three quarters of CYP spend less than 3 years in care in total, then either transition back home, or go on to live within their wider family network, in many instances under a special guardian arrangement. 5% are adopted (typically those under 5 years old) and just under half leave care on turning 18 years old, these tend to be CYP who entered care at an older age.
- 6.10 The age profile of our care population has shifted, there are now more older CYP in care. The higher proportion of 16/17 year olds in Lewisham's care is in part a result of the legacy of historic practice and as these older CYP move through the care system, with the number of new CYP entering care remaining low, we anticipate the overall net number of CYP in care to continue falling over the coming years.
- 6.11 The characteristics of CYP on the edge of coming into care and their presenting needs has become more complex. Approximately 60% of CYP who come into care are of secondary school age and following the pandemic we have seen increasingly more adolescents presenting with acute and profound social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH). This manifests in forms of self-harming, challenging behaviours arising from various forms of neurodivergence, missing episodes, serious violence, criminality and exploitation. There are limited local services for this cohort, long waiting lists for CAMHS and limited NHS provision for CYP with acute mental health challenges, especially upon discharge from hospital.
- 6.12 CYP with complex SEMH needs, who are also more vulnerable to criminal and sexual exploitation is now one of our high cost drivers. It is more difficult to find foster placements to care for adolescents, with carers who can manage some of the complexities, risks and challenges they bring. Therefore the cost of care placements for adolescents tends to be higher than younger children in general. The more complex adolescents require high intensity care, often in solo placements because of

their needs and/or the risk of harm they pose to themselves and others and the high cost of their placements reflects higher risk and intensity of intervention and containment. At the end of Section 6 there are three case studies provided to illustrate the complexity of some of these CYP's lives and the challenges we face sourcing the right kind of care and placements for them.

- 6.13 Section 7 sets out how the next phase of the Integrated Adolescent Service (IAS) is being developed to expand in-house specialist skills and support to better help this cohort, mirroring to some extent the approach taken with the Meliot centre whose services are largely orientated towards younger CYP and parents. It also refers to the proposals we have put forward to build our own small children's homes to care for the most vulnerable adolescents.
- 6.14 Nationally, in contrast to the rising numbers of CYP in care, the number of registered foster carers is in decline, resulting in fewer foster placement options for CYP. This is another factor that contributes to greater demand for residential care and therefore increased costs. As of March 2023, nationally there was an 8% decrease in foster families from 2019, with an estimated shortage of 6,500 families.
- 6.15 The national picture is reflected in Lewisham with a reduction in the suitability and availability of foster care placements and a 5% increase in the use of residential care, as table 7 shows. As at July 2024 there were 59 CYP placed in residential or secure care, compared to 41 in June 2023 (excludes parent and baby provision).
- 6.16 Prior to 2018 the Lewisham fostering recruitment service was an externally contracted service, which failed to deliver. An in-house team was subsequently created in 2018/19, but the legacy of that operating model resulted in having a small pool of in-house foster carers and in a very competitive market, this is proving hard to change. As the table above shows we are on a small upward direction for in-house fostering placements, but these are small gains and there is more action required to increase our in-house fostering pool. Some of the activity being undertaken is referenced in Section 7 as part of our Placements Sufficiency Strategy.
- 6.17 Table 2 showed that despite rising referrals to CSC, prior to 2023/24 the overall spend was relatively flat. However, we had a sharp rise in spend from 2023/24 arising from the increased cost of placements. Market forces of supply and demand, inflation and risk aversion of providers dealing with complex CYP have all driven up the cost of externally commissioned placements and residential children's homes placements in particular by circa 40% over the last two years. Leaving local authorities with very little, if any negotiating power to manage these costs down.
- 6.18 At present Lewisham has no local council run children's homes and a relatively small pool of in-house Foster Carers, so internal placement sufficiency is limited. Therefore the council is heavily reliant on commissioned placements for 60-65% of all its care placements. This reliance combined with a high rate of CYP in care, an older care population and increasingly complex presentations, has made Lewisham particularly vulnerable to the spiralling cost pressure of care placements.
- 6.19 Tables 6 and 7 below show an average cost for the different placement types as at July 2024 and how they have changed in the last 12 months. There is no national benchmark information that is available to compare, but we know the spiralling cost

of care placements is not a Lewisham issue. A recent LGA report noted that there has been a sharp increase in the number of placements costing at least £10,000 per week up from 120 in 2018/19 to 1,510 in 2022/23 with the most expensive recorded placement costing £63,000 per week.

[Children's social care placements costing £10,000-plus rise sharply in five years – new LGA analysis | Local Government Association](#)

Table 8 Costs listed as at July 2024.

PLACEMENT TYPE	Average Weekly cost	Full year effect 1 CYP
Connected Carer <i>(Includes carer fees and overheads of running the service)</i>	£830	£43k
Lewisham Foster Carer <i>(Includes average carer fees and overheads of running the service)</i>	£830	£43k
Independent Foster Carer	£1,200	£62k
Semi independent/Supported	£1,700	£88k
Parent & Baby Residential	£4,000	£204k
Registered Residential/Secure	£7,200	£374k
Unregistered Residential	£11,900	£619k

Table 9

Changing cost of placements	July 2023	July 2024	Difference
Net no. CYP in care	440	443	+3
No in residential/secure placement	36	59	+23
Average weekly cost of residential care	c£5,200	c£7,200	+£2,000
Full year effect of average cost of residential care per child	c£270,000	c£374,400	+c£104,000
Full year effect of average cost for total cohort.	c£9.7m	c£22.1m	+c£12.4m

6.20 The tables above use average costs, but there is a wide variation. The lowest costing residential placement is £1,000 per week and the most expensive is £17,800 per week. The full year effect of the highest cost placement is circa £930,000 and typically every child placed in unregistered solo provision costs circa £600k per year. One CYP can make a significant difference to a forecast, which makes the spend in this area highly volatile.

6.21 When a CYP is placed in a high-cost placement (typically in a unregistered home and increasingly with a court supervised Deprivation of Liberty Order in place), CSC will work hard to find a suitable and less costly placement. Placement movements and in particular placement breakdowns add further trauma in the lives of a very vulnerable group of CYP and so therefore we aim to work with providers to manage any changes as sensitively as possible. Unfortunately, there have been a number of occasions when we are asked by a provider to remove a child from their provision with little notice. In such circumstances finding a new registered provision quickly can be very challenging. See case study 3 on page 17-18 proving an example.

6.22 The number of CYP in placements with a weekly cost of over £10k has risen from 2 at the end of 2022/23 to 10 at the end of 2023/24 and at the time of writing this report we have 12 CYP in placements costing over £10k per week. In the last two years the most expensive placement has been £26,000 per week. The rising cost of placements shows no signs of abating. Table 9 shows the five highest cost placements (August 2024) that equates to 10% of overall spend on placements.

Weekly cost	Annualised
£17,858	£931,157
£15,621	£814,517
£15,750	£821,250
£17,220	£897,900
£17,587	£917,036
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£4,381,860</b>

Table 9

### 6.23 Kinship care and Permanence

Kinship is an umbrella term to describe a broad range of placements for both CYP in care and permanent arrangements for CYP who are no longer in care, where they are being cared for by a member of their extended family or friends. Where a CYP cannot remain with their parent/s, the wider family network is always the first option we explore and try to facilitate. There are a variety of different family court orders and statutory regulations associated with these different arrangements.

6.24 This is a frequently a cohort of CYP with less prominence in discourse on care costs. However, there are significant costs associated with post looked after status 'permanent' arrangements. Table 4 illustrates that the second largest cost pressure in the care budget is that associated with spend on 'permanence'. Most permanent arrangements are forms of 'kinship' care, but not all. For example, CYP living in Special Guardianship (SGO) arrangements or under Child Arrangement Orders (CAO) are no longer 'looked after' in care and may be living in kinship care or may with a former foster carer. This is growing group, in 2019/20 19 SGO's were granted compared to 35 in 2023/24.

CYP in different kinship arrangements	Number of CYP	Average cost per child/week (based on 2023/2024)	Total cost per year (based on 2023/2024)
No. CYP in Reg 24/25 kinship arrangements	31	£447	£0.7m
No. CYP being supported on SGO within first 2 years	62	£411	£1.3m
No. CYP being supported on SGO, post 2 years	209	£205	£2.2m
No CYP being supported by CAO	8	£177	£0.7m
<b>Total</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>£359</b>	<b>£4.8m</b>

6.25 For CYP living in SGO and CAO arrangements the placing local authority is required to pay an allowance to the carer throughout the child's minority. For the first two years this is equivalent to the fostering allowance, from year three onwards it becomes means tested. Whilst the cost of supporting these arrangements is slightly less than foster care, the total spend on this particular cohort is significant, in addition to the costs associated with adoption. Lewisham currently has a total of 310 CYP in all different types of kinship and permanence arrangements.

## 6.26 Case Studies

### **Tony – case study (anonymised)**

Tony is 15 years old, he has also suffered traumatic experiences in his past and Tony makes frequent allegations against his parents. Tony has alleged sexual abuse by his parents; child protection enquiries did not substantiate these allegations. Tony's mental health has been a barrier to any further investigation of allegations of parental abuse, despite attempts made by the professional network. His parents deny all allegations of sexual harm or abuse. Tony has been subject to religious practices by his mother (using holy water and prayers) to manage his behaviour, which is believed to have had traumatic impact on him. Tony rejects his entire family and regularly voices violent fantasies of murdering his parents.

Initially the LA supported Tony and his mother by putting 24 round the clock staffing into the family home. This was unsuccessful and Tony was taken into police protection, following an incident where he assaulted his mother.

Tony complex behaviours have become more acute and harmful since 2020 at home and in care. They include: Urinating and defecating on himself. A refusal to eat, sleep in a bed, wash his clothes, take medication, or undergo surgery or get into a car. Excessively cleaning himself sometimes with toxic substances. Jumping out a window breaking an arm and leg. Sexualised and aggressive behaviour towards and allegations against staff and social workers causing injury. Satan worshipping and self harming.

In January 2022, Lewisham issued care proceedings and were granted an Interim Care Order with a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguard Order. Tony was placed in a regulated children's home. The placement gave notice within 6 weeks due to significant concerns for the safety of other children in the placement. Tony moved to an emergency unregulated solo placement, which Lewisham set up specifically with a trusted provider. Despite the challenges of caring for Tony, staff have been proactive in trying to meet his needs. Tony remains in this placement but has gone missing numerous times and on occasion for several weeks.

Tony is not able to be placed with other children due to his complex behaviours, the restrictions of the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguard Order (DOLS) and the risk of harm he poses to others. Tony's DOLS order requires 3 to 1 staffing and locked doors and windows. In addition, due his OCD, he needs to have a clinically clean living space and control his entire environment. Since February 2022, despite extensive placement searches nationally, we have not been able to identify an appropriate regulated placement, that could meet Tony's needs. In July 2024, a court appointed 'expert' was instructed to find a regulated placement and has been unsuccessful to date.

Tony is currently in hospital under a S2 detention under the Mental Health Act 1983, which expires at the end of September. Subject to assessment he may remain in hospital beyond this period, under S3. If not he will return to his placement.

**Rachel (anonymised)**

Rachel is now 17 years old, her mother died when she was a child and she lived in orphanages where she endured abuse prior to moving to the UK, aged 12 to live with her uncle. Rachel became known to CSC in the UK due to going missing repeatedly and having been sexually exploited. Rachel came into care in early 2023 at the age of 16 following a disclosure that she had been sexually abused by her uncle.

Rachel was initially placed in an emergency, at the time a semi-independent provision was the only option available. She then moved to a foster placement in June 2023, this broke down as they felt unable to keep Rachel safe, she would be repeatedly missing and went missing for 3 months. In Autumn 2023, Lewisham issued care proceedings and sought a Recovery Order to locate her and a Secure Accommodation Order.

In December 2023, when she was eventually located by the police, she required sexual health treatment and was believed to have been living in a property where drugs were being processed and distributed.

Rachel was placed in secure placement for 5 months located in the North West of England and successfully engaged in therapeutic programme. Rachel thrived in the secure environment and was able to develop some trusting relationships with staff and talk to them about her lived experiences. This time also enabled the placement to complete a comprehensive assessment of risk that has informed her care plan moving forward. A significant achievement for Rachel was her educational attendance during her time in the secure setting which was close to 100%. After huge gaps in her education throughout her childhood, Rachel has progressed significantly.

In May 2023, after a transition period, Rachel successfully transitioned from secure to a residential children's home, where she remains and is doing very well. She has formed trusted relationships with staff and there have been no missing episodes. Rachel is working towards being able to live independently and remains committed to her education and has been attending college.



### **Scarlet (anonymised)**

Scarlet is 14 years old, she has two older siblings, aged 15 and 17. There is a long history of CSC involvement with Scarlet's family. Scarlet's mum is also care experienced. Scarlet and her siblings came into care in 2015, Scarlett was 5 years old. This resulted from their parents substance misuse and domestic violence.

After 5 years of relative stability in a foster care, the placement broke down in July 2020 following an allegation of physical abuse by foster carer. Scarlet and her siblings moved to a new foster placement where they remained until 2021. In 2021 no foster carers could be identified to care for all three siblings, so Scarlet was placed with her sister, and her brother was placed by himself. The placement for Scarlet and her sister ended after a few months as the carer felt she could not manage Scarlet's behaviour.

Scarlet went on to have several other foster placements; all of which came to an end due escalating concerns relating to her challenging and aggressive behaviour. In spring 2022 she was excluded from school following an incident where Scarlet hit a teacher. In autumn of that year Scarlet moved to a residential placement and school. They gave notice on the placement one month later due to Scarlet's frequent absconding and the risks she posed to others. Scarlet subsequently had 5 more foster placements that year.

Within 6 months in 2023 Scarlet moved to three separate solo (residential) placements. One ended following an incident of fire setting and another following an assault on staff. All those working with her were very worried about how to keep her and others safe with increasingly violent behaviours towards others, self harming and substance use. In early 2024, Scarlet had a planned move to a Children's Home. There were several concerning incidents both within the home and in the community that included assaults on staff, other children and in the community. Her exploitation risks increased and the home ended the placement on the grounds they could not keep her safe.

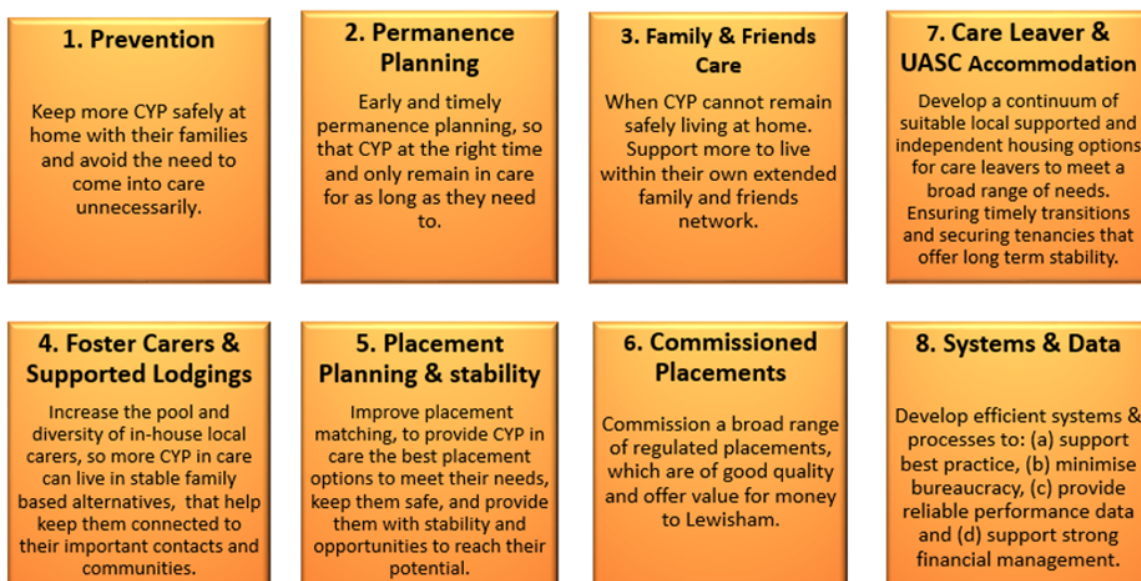
The Local Authority decided to apply for a Secure Order and search for a Secure Welfare Provision, which Scarlett moved into in April 2024. In July, the Secure unit contacted the Local Authority giving immediate notice, in the 3 months there Scarlett has been involved in over 30 incidents of self-harm and physical assault. The incident the precipitated the placement giving notice was Scarlet physically attacked two members staff unprovoked, resulting in their hospitalisation.

Scarlet has complexities that are not understood, unfortunately she has not been in any placement long enough to receive the assessments and support that she needs. Sadly, multiple placement moves have impacted upon her mental health and sense of stability and security. She has remained in an unregulated provision under a DOLS since the end of the secure provision. The Local Authority are searching for a regulated children's home – this will need to be a solo provision in the first instance. The last 5 residential and secure placements have been at a cost of between £11 – 21 per week.

## 7 Measures taken to control and reduce costs

### 7.1 The Placement Sufficiency Strategy

There is no silver bullet or one activity that will make a significant difference to the overall placement cost position. The cumulative effect of a range of measures will over time improve placement sufficiency, quality and reduce overall spend on care. Every Local Authority has a duty to produce a Placements Sufficiency Strategy, which sets out how it ensures there are arrangements in place to provide sufficient placements for CYP in care and housing for care leavers. CSC revised its Sufficiency Strategy and associated activity in 2022, it has 8 key aims:



7.2 **Prevention** – For some CYP it is right for them to come into care for their protection. Care can provide safety, security and be transformational. But for most, they will have better outcomes remaining at home and/or within their extended family network, this is especially true for CYP who enter care late in childhood. Prevention the need for CYP to come into care is the single most effective measure to reduce cost. Sections above have detailed the preventative measures that have already been introduced.

7.3 The next significant area for development is phase two of the Integrated Adolescent Service (IAS). As the profile of CYP entering care evolves with more complex adolescents, there is still more that can be done to reduce care entries for this older age group. We are in the process of reshaping services to better meet the needs of this growing cohort. With the assistance of the DfE Family First Pathfinder grant funding and a targeted campaign to recruit more part time short breaks foster carers, the directorate is creating an edge of care Family Help offer, orientated towards more support for adolescents and their families in order to reduce the need for their entry to care. This service will start providing this additional support in October 2024.

7.4 **Permanence planning** - Improving our practice and oversight has been enabling more CYP to transition out of care either back home or into other permanent options more quickly, for example into special guardianship (SG) arrangements. Between 2019/20 and 2023/24 the number of SG and Child Arrangement Orders granted

increased from 19 per year to 36 and we are currently supporting a total of 280 CYP in SG and CAO arrangements who would have otherwise been in care.

- 7.5 **Family & friends care** - Expanding the support in place for connected carers, has supported more CYP to live with extended family instead of mainstream foster care. This provides better outcomes for CYP and is marginally less expensive than mainstream foster care placements. More work is being done with this aspect of care, to further increase connected carer numbers. The Kinship Service has just been reviewed to ensure it is working the most effectively and efficiently.
- 7.6 **Fostering** – We have streamlined our onboarding processes to assess and approve carers more quickly and introduced emergency carers. We also re-purposed Bromley Road as a welcoming base for carers support and training and have refreshed our marketing campaigns. We also re-joined the South London Fostering and SG Consortium to help influence the market and increased Lewisham fostering childcare allowances and payments to incentivise recruitment and retention. In a highly competitive market and we have continued to recruit reasonably well compared to other Boroughs, but there is much more that we are doing to increase our pool of carer's.
- 7.7 In 2022 we successfully bid for DfE innovation money following a Newton Europe review (funded by the DfE) to set up our Fostering Hub which is a small team of foster carers working as employees to recruit new carers. Combined with revised ways of working in our fostering service, a much improved marketing strategy and a reshaping of our support and training offer, we continue to make ourselves more competitive in a challenging space. We aim to increase our pool of foster carers and explore creative ways to use foster carers to support CYP on the edge of care, including short break provision and programme such as 'Mockingbird'. [The Mockingbird programme | The Fostering Network](#)
- 7.8 **Placement stability** - Strengthening practice to maintain good stability to reduce the number of breakdowns and moves CYP experience is critical to their outcomes in care and has cost implications. A lack of control over placement breakdown and providers ending contracts at short notice, is a key driver for reducing reliance on the external placement market and running our own children's homes.
- 7.9 **Commissioned placements** – We have reshaped how we search for, match, quality assure and manage commissioned placements over the last two years. By re-structuring the Placements Service with additional capacity, introducing care provider forums to build relationships and identify placements for hard to place CYP. Supporting providers to seek fast track Ofsted registration where appropriate.
- 7.10 Shared funding arrangements have been introduced with health partners to split costs for complex care placements and a clinical lead in partnership with ICB in commissioning has been appointed, to help broker complex care packages. A Shared Funding Panel is chaired by the Executive Director. In 2022/23 the ICB contributed £1m to the overall cost of residential placements, in 2023/24 it was £1.4m
- 7.11 **Care leaver and UASC accommodation**  
On behalf of the Children and Young People's Directorate, Supported Housing Commissioning in Adults Services, commissions and manages a Young Persons

Supported Housing Pathway (SHP). This pathway serves 2 groups of young people, care leavers (18-21) and homeless 16-17 year olds. The services are provided by expert providers, SHP services are designed with CSC Corporate Parenting Service and co-ordinated directly by a Housing Pathways Officer in the Leaving Care service to ensure we have constant throughput and minimal voids. This has been a successful offer resulting in Lewisham having 92% rate of care leavers in 'suitable' accommodation in the local area, compared to a London average of 88%. This ensures that more Lewisham care leavers have secure accommodation that helps them to thrive in the longer term.

- 7.12 In 2021 CSC undertook a review of spend on semi-independent accommodation for care leavers. On average the spend was £1,106 pw per YP. Based on this funding an envelope of funding was allocated by CSC to commission additional bed spaces in the Pathway to save on higher cost accommodation. Since 2021 SHP has expanded to meet increased need, in 2022 9 additional rooms of 24 hr supported accommodation at £546 per unit pw were added. In August 2024 a new service is being established with Peabody with 16 bedrooms of 24-hour support. At £456 per unit pw.
- 7.13 This has achieved an average saving of £617.60 per unit pw. Additionally in March 2022 additional Pathway Beds were ring fenced for Care Leavers. There are now 61 beds for Care Leavers in the pathway, for a contribution of £800,893, an average of £252 pw but varying a great deal depending on support levels. This is the cost to the Council, but the providers claim rent over local housing allowance rates.
- 7.14 SHP actively looks to step down the young people to lower support placements when they are ready, to promote independence. Lewisham Housing offers Care Leavers band 1 social housing nomination rights. This creates good through put of accommodation in the pathway. As the Supported Housing contracts are block funded, this positive throughput increases the value for the council by the pathway accommodating more YP in the same bedspaces at a flat cost for the year.
- 7.15 We have since taken further steps to diversifying our housing pathway for care leavers, from care into semi-independent accommodation from 16, and into independent housing when they are ready. This includes a development underway for two units in Amersham and Northover. Through 2023/24 the Amersham unit has been repurposed to create an Ofsted registered semi-independent accommodation for 5 young people in care aged 16/17 who have moderate to high support needs. Northover is a unit for 8 care leavers which provides an extension for our housing pathway. Contracts have been issued to NACRO to run both units on our behalf and they are expected to be operationalised in October 2024. This block contract arrangement prevents the need for individual payments to be spot purchased and paid for on a weekly basis, and is expected to result in a reduction in spend of £1.5m per year (£7.7m over the term of the contract) on placement costs for Children Looked After, and £0.9m per year (£4.6m over the term of the contract) on accommodation costs for young people leaving care.

## **8 Current system for procurement and commissioning of social care packages**

### **8.1 Commissioned Placements**

If a CYP cannot remain safely at home or in their current care placement, either in a planned or unplanned way, the first step is to always seek to identify extended family or friends. If there are no available or suitable family kinship options, the social worker completes a child's profile and placement request. Our placements service then sets about identifying an available, suitably matched placement according to the child's profile and needs. If foster care is considered suitable, the placements service will look for any in-house foster carer vacancies. If no in-house options are available the placements team will then seek to commission an independent placement, through the Commissioning Alliance and by using its own intelligence on knowing the movements of other CYP in care.

8.2 After discussion and sometimes negotiation with placement providers, one or more suitable options are presented to the social worker. Once chosen the placements officer agree the contract with the provider. Some negotiation may occur where there are peripheral costs, but for reasons already set out in this report, the Local Authority has very little negotiating power. The unpredictability of who, when, how and why a CYP comes into care, where and what type of placement and care they require to meet their individual needs, means all placements are spot purchased, although within a framework set by the Commissioning Alliance. It is not possible to predict the volume, frequency and nature of placements required to be able to block book multiple packages at discounted rates. Furthermore because competition for spaces is so high we are frequently required to pay a retainer to keep the placement if the CYP doesn't enter on an expected date.

### **8.3 Internal systems in place to support the commissioning process and ensure value for money is achieved**

There is a significant amount of management oversight regularly scrutinising high cost placements and exploring transitional arrangements into family based care or arrangements with a lower intensity care (and cost) as risks and needs reduce. However, in addition to the regular and agreed placement costs there are additional ad hoc costs related to specific CYP (extra counselling, transport for contact with a birth parent, additional assessments etc). We currently do not have a reliable report that shows full commitment and spend per child because the ICT finance system (ControCC) that sits behind the case management system (LCS) needs re-formatting and cleansing and also links to our payments system on Oracle to track actual spend. A project is underway to achieve this and we expect to be in a position where we can report on spend per CYP by the end of the financial year.

## 9 Additional measures being actioned

- 9.3 **Reducing court delays:** Lewisham is part of a London Regional District Family Judge (DFJ) pilot to explore how delays in the family courts can be reduced. Since the pandemic the family court proceedings have far exceeded the 26 weeks timescale set by the courts previously. The average length of proceedings is now 52 weeks, leading to CYP being in care for longer and additional court related costs. As part of this pilot combined with the DfE Family First Pathfinder programme, we are introducing a Court Progression Officer post to contribute to moving CYP through court proceedings without delay. [DFJ Trailblazers - Reducing Delay in Family Court | MV \(mutualventures.co.uk\)](#)
- 9.4 **Meliot centre services:** As part of the next stage of development for the Meliot we are exploring (a) how we develop wrap around high intensity/risk community parenting assessments, to reduce the reliance of parent and baby placements and (b) introduce an intensive programme of support in line with the PAUSE programme, to try and reduce repeat removals of CYP. We are also exploring whether more of the services delivered by this service can be done from various locations across the Borough e.g. Childrens Centres and Family Hubs, to reduce overhead costs [Pause – Creating Space for Change](#)
- 9.5 **Kinship care:** In December 2023 the former government published the kinship strategy, another of their responses to the 2022 Independent Review of Childrens Social Care. Its core aims are to enable and support more kinship carers to care for CYP in their family. We are currently reviewing our Special Guardianship team to prepare for either piloting or implementing the strategy in 2025. Just prior to the General Election the DfE contacted us to see if we would be interested in being part of a kinship pilot. We provided a positive response and we are awaiting information from the DfE about whether they are still planning on rolling out a pilot programme here which Lewisham could be a part of. [Championing kinship care: national kinship care strategy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- 9.6 **Children's Homes** - In addition to the Northover and Amersham projects being operationalised in October 2024, in September a proposal is being put to Mayor and Cabinet to re-purpose current buildings in the CYP Directorate asset register, to create and manage a series of council run small children's residential homes in Lewisham. In stage 1, three suitable buildings have been identified to develop up to 5 beds for our complex CYP.
- 9.7 **Children with Complex Needs and Short Breaks** – In connection with the Family First Pathfinder programme, the CSC and Education divisions will shortly be conducting a review into this service, including the local offer, eligibility criteria, short breaks provision and our current contractual arrangements with providers to explore the opportunities to both improve pathways for CYP while at the same time driving down costs. It is expected that this review will take approximately 3 months.

## 10 Measures considered and rejected

- 10.1 Creating in-house parent and baby residential units or block contract.** The nature of care placements is such that it is not possible to predict how many of what type we will need, this is especially the case with more specialist areas such as parent and baby assessment centres. Commissioning these type of placements operates in the same way as other placements, they are spot purchased. While we know that we are likely to need in the region of 10 at any time, we do not know what type we will need. Providers tend to have a specialist assessments for parents with learning needs. Therefore it is not possible to commission in blocks. We do not currently have sufficient expertise internally to develop our own provision and do not believe it will be cost effective.
- 10.2** As noted in paragraph 9.6 above, a report is going to Mayor & Cabinet to recommend work is commenced to open three new residential provisions. This report notes that the first phase of this project makes use of existing assets and so set up costs are relatively limited. The report notes our ambition to open further homes subsequently. As this is a new activity for the Council we believe it is prudent to roll out a programme on a phased basis, with careful monitoring of costs. It is not recommended to go to stage 2 and 3 in the programme until our assumptions are tested in stage 1. While revenue savings might be greater, there would be additional set up costs and increased risks if there are market changes or changes to the regulation of the sector.

## 11 Market reforms necessary to control costs.

- 11.1** In March 2022, The Competition and Marketing Authority conducted a national review of the care placements market, in response to concerns that councils were too often unable to access appropriate placements to meet the needs of CYP in their care, and the cost of such provision was too high. The CMA described the placement market as dysfunctional. It concluded there were significant problems in how it was functioning. Specifically, they found:
- a lack of placements of the right kind, in the right places, meaning that CYP are not consistently getting access to care that meets their needs.
  - the largest private providers of placements are making materially higher profits and charging materially higher prices than would be expected if the market were functioning effectively.
  - some of the largest private providers are carrying very high levels of debt, creating a risk of disorderly failure.
- 11.2** The CMA made a series of recommendations which fell into three categories:
- improved commissioning.
  - reviewing regulatory requirements to reduce barriers to providers.
  - reducing risk to CYP by providers exiting the market in an unplanned manner.
- [Children's social care market study final report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/108217/childrens-social-care-market-study-final-report.pdf)

**11.3** The children's social care sector welcomed the findings of the CMA but was disappointed in the lack of action by the DfE to respond appropriately to this challenge. Our hope is that the new incoming government will quickly seek to address this. A relatively low-cost intervention by central government to properly regulate the market would support local government to better manage this financial pressure.

**11.4** The Children's Wellbeing Bill is scheduled for this parliament and is expected to introduce a number of the changes recommended in the 2022 Independent Review of Children's Social Care and the subsequent (previous) government response: Stable Homes Built on Love 2023. In both documents there are a recommendations and proposals for how problems in the placement 'market' can be better managed.

[Independent review of children's social care - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/independent-review-of-childrens-social-care)

[Children's social care: stable homes, built on love - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/stable-homes-built-on-love)



## **12 Financial Monitoring**

**12.1** The Period 4 monitoring position for the directorate shows a pressure of £14.5m as detailed in the earlier budget monitoring item, off which the CSC pressure is £10.1m. This includes £0.9m of cost reductions proposed by the service and agreed by the Executive Management team. This pressure is after an additional £10.9m was added to the budget as part of 2023/24 budget setting, due to the rising costs detailed within the body of this report.

**12.2** The £10.1m is almost exclusively within care costs as detailed in tables 2 and 3. The number of CYP in care has been largely consistent as shown in Para. 5.11. The increased expenditure across 2023/24 and 2024/25 is due to the number of CYP in care placements costing £7k a week or higher (termed high cost). The forecast assumes the CYP in care in July 2024 continue to receive care at a comparable level for the remainder of the financial year, there will be new care packages agreed and packages no longer required but the forecast assumption is that these have a net nil impact on the forecast position.

**12.3** There are various risks facing the service and could impact on the overall financial position including:

- Additional high costs placements – one CYP in a newly agreed high-cost placement at £17k per week would add costs of £74k per month.
- Inflationary and market demands on price.
- Service delivering on the savings which have been factored into the projections.
- Reliability of robust data for forecasting purposes.
- Wider demographic and economy issues that could influence family dynamics and impact on demand.

£2m has been included in the risk section of the monitoring report to reflect the above.

## **13 Report Author and Contact**

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