

Children and Young People Select Committee			
Report Title	Safeguarding Services		
Key Decision	No	Item No.	3
Ward	All		
Contributors	Bernice Walters, Interim Service Manager Quality Assurance		
Class	Open	Date: 4 March 2014	

1. Purpose and Summary of the Report

1.1 This report provides a brief overview of the safeguarding services in Lewisham. The report focuses on:-

- The number of children subject to child protection plans and their demographics.
- The changing patterns and trends in the numbers of children subject to plans and how Children's Social Care is responding to this.

2. Recommendations

2.1 This is a report to the Select Committee on Safeguarding. There have been previous reports and reviews of safeguarding services in Lewisham following the Baby P Inquiry. It is recommended that there is an annual report of the progress in safeguarding services. Members are asked to note and discuss the report.

3. Policy Context

3.1 There are a number of key policies and legislation that govern the work in safeguarding children:

- The Children Act 2004, updated all the previous legislation in relation to children. This Act gives boundaries to local authorities to help them better regulate the official intervention in the interests of children.
- The London Child Protection Procedures 2014, are Pan London procedures for protecting children that all London local authorities are expected to adopt. This ensures a high level framework and a common understanding amongst all agencies working to protect children in London.
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013, provides a national framework and the core requirements which agencies and professionals should follow to agree their own ways of working together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

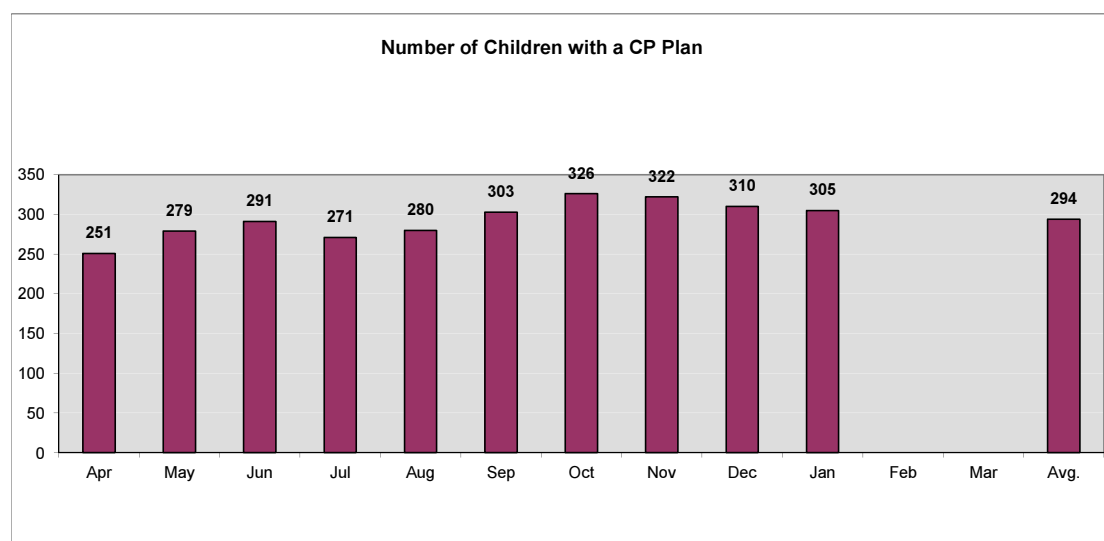
4. Details

4.1 Children's Social Care works with children who are considered to be children in need, who require support or services and children subject to child protection plans. Children in need are supported to achieve their outcomes and there will be a plan for the child that is regularly reviewed to ensure that progress is being made. Children subject to child protection plans will be placed on a plan following an initial child protection conference and will have suffered or considered to be at risk of significant harm.

4.2 In January 2014 there were 305 children subject to child protection plans. These children will all be subject to multi-agency plans that will be reviewed by the core group of professionals involved with the child and their family. When children become subject to a child protection the conference is required to specify the reasons for the plan and the category of the plan. The categories are:

- Physical Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Neglect

Graph 1: Number of children with a child protection plan



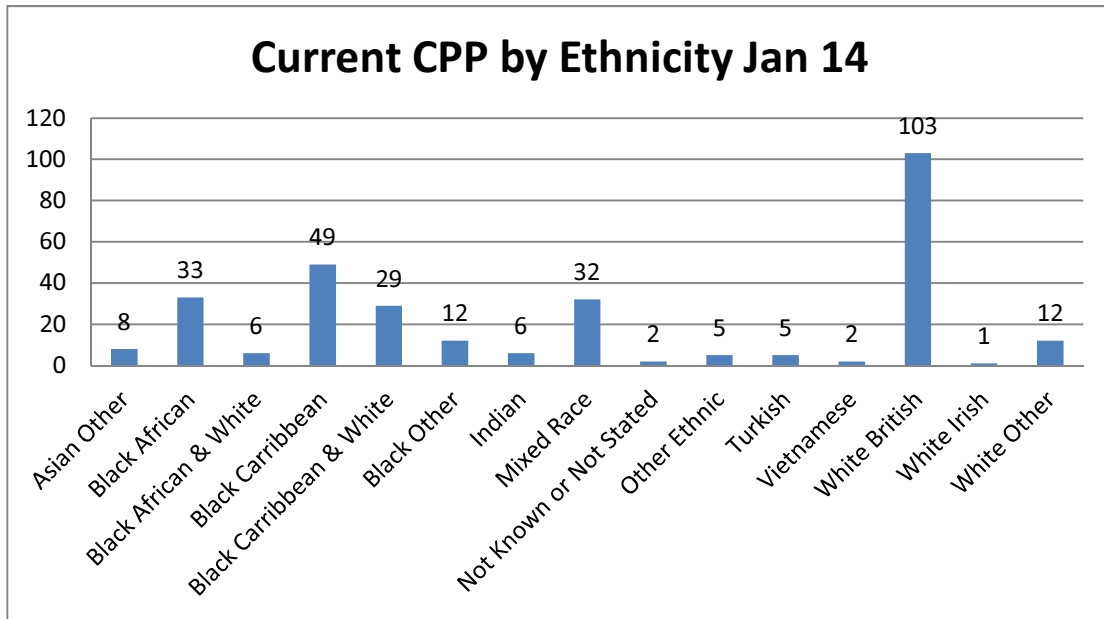
4.3 The current gender breakdown is :

- 163 Male
- 141 Female
- 1 Unborn (gender unknown)

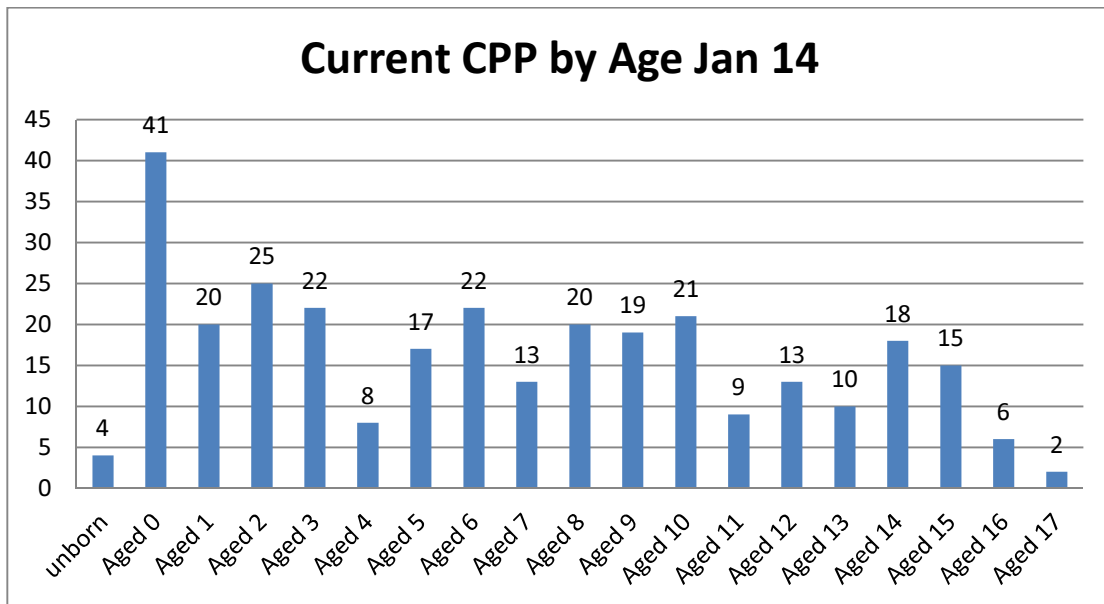
4.4 The gender breakdown does fluctuate, but the higher number of males follows a national trend.

4.5 In Lewisham the ethnicity of children subject to child protection plans largely follows the population breakdown. Currently 60% of the population aged 0-19 years are from a BME background.

Graph 2: Ethnicity of children subject to a child protection plan

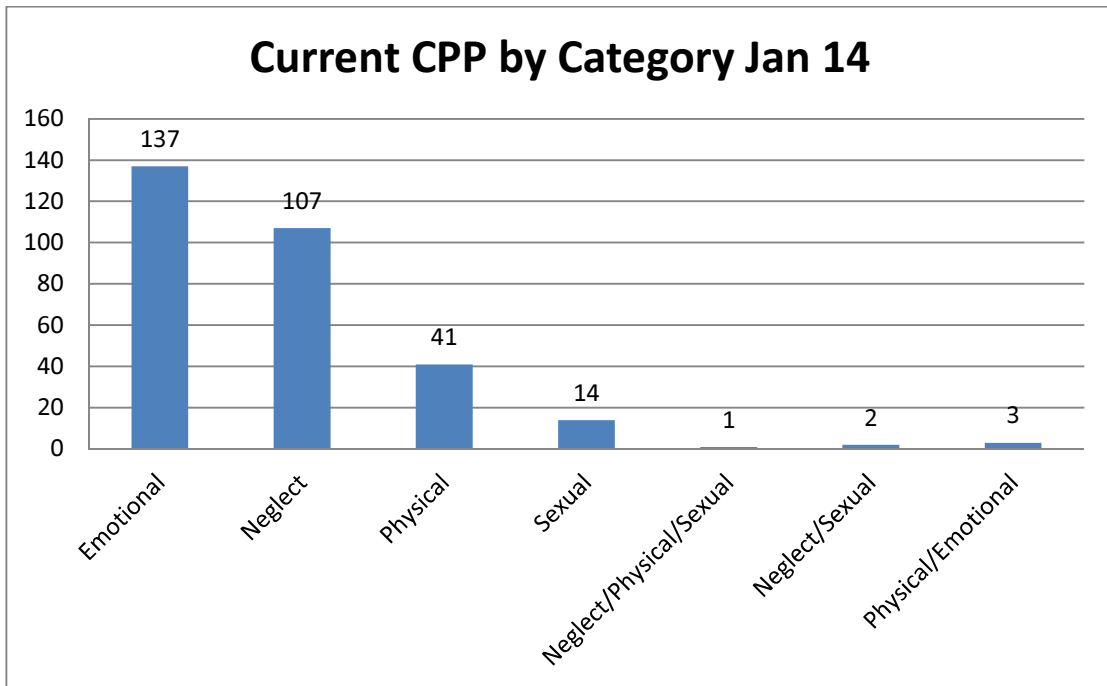


Graph 3: Age of children subject to a child protection plan

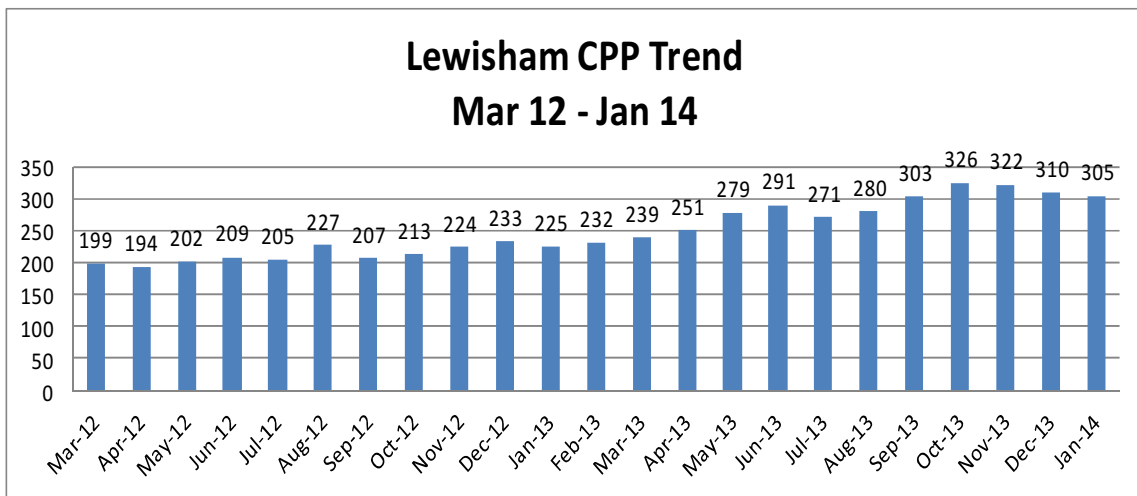


4.6 The largest group of children (15%) subject to plans are under the age of one. This reflects their vulnerability and is a common pattern in Lewisham as there is a significant issue in the borough with the number of children who become subject to plans due to domestic violence in the family. These children are usually placed on a child protection plan under the category of emotional abuse. Very young children are at much greater risk of being significantly harmed in domestic disputes. The chart below shows the current categories for the children on a child protection plan.

Graph 4: Category of children subject to a child protection plan.



Graph 5: Rise in number of children subject to a child protection plan.



4.7 There has been a considerable rise in the number of children subject to a plan as can be seen in graph 5 above. In March 2012 the number of children subject to a child protection plan was 198, increasing to 235 children by March 2013, a 19% increase over the period of a year. In October 2013 this figure had risen to 327, which was a further 37% increase in a six month period. This has created considerable pressures within Children's Social Care and extra staff have been recruited to deal with the increased workload. We regularly audit these cases to ensure that registration is appropriate and to see if alternative plans could have been actioned.

4.8 The latest audit was in January 2014 of the children who had become subject to plans in November 2013. This found that in 26% of cases where the child became subject to a child protection plan, the concern was in relation to the

high level of domestic violence in the household. Child protection plans were considered appropriate for 31 of the 32 children who were made subject to child protection plans. In only one case, it may have been possible for alternative arrangements to be considered. In the vast majority of cases the threshold for significant harm was met and some parents previously had children removed from their care.

- 4.9 When children become subject to a child protection plan there is a review child protection conference after 3 months and subsequent review conferences every six months. At each conference the need for the child to remain on a child protection plan will be considered. Core groups of key professionals and family members meet regularly in between the conferences to review the plan and whether it is working.
- 4.10 The reasons for the increase have been carefully explored and were reported to the Local Children's Safeguarding Board in December 2013. The length of time that children were subject to plans was less than our statistical neighbours, and there was evidence to suggest that the issues that led to children being placed on a plan were being addressed in a timely manner.
- 4.11 Lewisham also performed well in relation to children who became subject to child protection plans for a second or subsequent time. This is important as too many cases where children become subject to a plan for a second time would suggest that they were originally removed from the Register before the concerns were fully resolved.
- 4.12 In January 2014, 10.3% of children that became subject to a plan in Lewisham was for the second or subsequent time. This is compared with the national average of 14.9% and a statistical average of 12%.
- 4.13 There have been audits of child protection cases by Children's Social Care Service Managers in July 2013, December 2013 and January 2014. These audits check if the thresholds set for social care intervention is at the right level and are interpreted appropriately. There was evidence to suggest the thresholds were being appropriately applied.
- 4.14 Therefore it was concluded that, despite the increase in child protection cases, the overall quality of the work has not declined and that Lewisham continues to perform well in relation to statistical neighbours and national benchmarking data. It was concluded that the increase in children becoming subject to child protection plans may, in part, be attributable to the economic downturn, as it known during these times that there is increased pressure and stress on parents.
- 4.15 There has been a rise in the population of children in Lewisham. There are currently 70,900 children in the Borough aged between 0-19 years, which is 25% of the overall population. This is a 12.8% increase over the last 5 years. There has also been a 30% increase in the birth rate in the Borough since 2003.
- 4.16 Lewisham Children's Social Care has recruited a new Family Social Work team, Albany, to respond to the rise in child protection cases. This team began operating in November 2013.

- 4.17 It would be reasonable to expect that the rise in children subject to child protection plans might reflect a rise in care proceedings, because as the concerns escalate the Local Authority will seek to issue care proceedings to exercise more powers to protect children. However, the current projections do not indicate a rise in care proceedings. At the end of October 2013 there were 68 families in care proceedings. This figure remains stable over time.
- 4.18 Lewisham is currently in a Project with the London Borough's of Greenwich, Lambeth and Southwark, working alongside the Judiciary, Children's Guardians and other key partners to reduce the length of care proceedings. This will ensure better outcomes for children who are subject to care proceedings because they can be moved onto permanent carers sooner, if they cannot return home.
- 4.19 There are quality assurance controls within Children's Social Care to measure progress, timeliness and quality of child protection plans. Service Managers have a monthly audit meeting where the performance, monitoring and audit reports are evaluated in relation to both the safeguarding and looked after children functions. This work and the follow up with line managers, serves to ensure that high standards are maintained and any issues identified, either with individual cases or the wider child protection systems, and are quickly addressed.
- 4.20 Children's Social Care also fulfils the LADO role (Local Authority Designated Officer) whose role is to deal with allegations against people who work with children within the London borough of Bromley. This role ensures that there are safeguards in place where a person who works with children has an allegation made against them, or a concern is raised. Between January – December 2013 there were 114 allegations made against people in a position of trust working in Lewisham. The previous year there were 154 allegations.
- 4.21 Although there was a fall in allegations reported last year, in 2011 there were 91 reported allegations and in 2010, 95 reported allegations. Over the years the pattern of allegations has remained fairly consistent. The majority (50 - 60%) of the referrals come from schools, and mainly primary schools in relation to physical abuse of children. Approximately 20% of the referrals are in relation to foster carers, and 10% in relation to nursery worker workers. The LADO offers oversight into the management of individual cases as well as advice and guidance. Where there is Police involvement the LADO will closely liaise with the Police during the course of the investigation. Approximately a third of cases are substantiated but the very few cases (less than 1%) result in police prosecution. This follows a consistent pattern in Lewisham and is similar to other local authorities.
- 4.22 The LSCB (Local Safeguarding Children's Board) oversees the safeguarding of children across Lewisham. Working Together 2013 states that the LSCB is:
- (a) To co-ordinate what is done by each person or body represented on the Board for the purpose of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the area; and
 - (b) To ensure the effectiveness of what is done by each person or body for those purposes.

4.23 In addition the guidance states that:

- (a) The chair must publish an annual report on the effectiveness of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the local area and
- (b) The report should provide a rigorous and transparent assessment of the performance and effectiveness of local services. It should identify areas of weakness, the causes of those weaknesses and the action being taken to address them as well as other proposals for action.
- (c) The chair must publish an annual report on the effectiveness of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the local area and
- (d) The report should provide a rigorous and transparent assessment of the performance and effectiveness of local services. It should identify areas of weakness, the causes of those weaknesses and the action being taken to address them as well as other proposals for action.

4.24 Once completed the Annual Report should then be submitted to the Chief Executive, the Leader of the Council, the local police and crime commissioner and the chair of the health and wellbeing board

4.25 The functions of LSCB's fall into seven main categories:

- Developing policies and procedures.
- Ensuring appropriate training is provided across the Borough in relation to safeguarding.
- Communicating and raising awareness of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and how this can be best implemented.
- Participating in the local planning/commissioning of children's services.
- Reviewing all child deaths.
- Ensuring agencies are effective, individually and collectively.
- Conducting Serious Case Reviews into non-accidental fatal, and near fatal harm to children, where lessons can be learned.

4.26 Lewisham's LSCB is a well-attended and purposeful Board. The main parts of it work are carried out by a number of sub groups which are all multi agency in their membership, Lewisham's LSCB currently has the following sub-groups:

- Policies, Procedures and Training
- Monitoring, Evaluation and Service Improvement
- Serious Case Reviews
- Child Death Overview Panel
- Child Sexual Abuse
- Neglect

4.27 Lewisham CSC has worked with the London Metropolitan Police to develop a Pan London Child Sexual Exploitation Protocol. This was formally launched in February 2014 and Lewisham CSC was commended for its work, which will now be rolled out across London for other local authorities to adopt. Lewisham CSC worked with the Police to train staff to recognise and respond to CSE. CSC was part of a pilot to host Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation meetings, (MASE). These meetings are held monthly and are attended by key partners, -sexual health, Youth Offending Services, Early Intervention, voluntary agencies, etc. The meetings are chaired by the Police and discuss the young people in the Borough where there are concerns in relation to CSE. The

purpose is to ensure there is an appropriate multi-agency response but also that networks are identified and perpetrators persecuted.

4.28 Since the work began on CSE, Lewisham Police now have a Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Persons Police Unit. There has been a significant increase in the numbers of child sexual exploitation meetings held. Last year there were four times as many CSE meetings held, compared to the period before this work began. Hotspots for CSE in the Borough have been identified and appropriate Police action taken. The majority of the victims (73%) are not children in local authority care and 50% are between the ages of 13-14 years of age. Individual work is undertaken with victims of CSE to raise their awareness about exploitation, as most of the victims do not accept they are being exploited. The professionals involved with the young people also need to gain their trust so victims are willing to share information about the perpetrators, who can then be brought to justice.

4.29 The first Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Plan is due to be launched in April 2014. This plan and the forum that will support it, brings together 8 strands under one policy:

- Domestic violence
- Rape and sexual violence
- Stalking
- Trafficking (modern day slavery)
- Prostitution
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
- Forced Marriage
- Honour Based Violence.

4.30 It is hoped that the work of the VAWG forum, when launched in April 2014, will ensure there is an effective strategic steer to the work undertaken, raise awareness and share good practice.

5. Financial implications

None

6. Legal implications

6.1 There are no specific legal implication arising from this report. Lewisham CSC provides Childrens safeguarding and support serves in accordance with the statutory framework provided by the Children Act 1989 and succeeding statutory requirements.

7. Crime and disorder implications

7.1 None.

8. Equalities implications

8.1 None.

9. Environmental implications

9.1 None.

10. Background documents and originator

If there are any queries on this report, please contact Ian Smith on 0208 314 8140.