

## **Appendix A**

### **1. Introduction**

1.1. This report outlines the approach being taken to reducing offending among Looked After Children in Lewisham. It is written in response to the Prison Reform Trust Action Plan 'Reducing Offending by Looked After Children' aimed at local Councillors.

### **2. Background**

2.1. There have been various policies and strategies which have influenced the provision for looked after children resulting in:

- A strengthening of legislative responsibilities.
- An increased focus on measures to assess and improve the outcomes for looked after children including the prevention of offending and responses to offending.
- A shift away from the use of residential care towards foster care.
- An increased emphasis on the participation of looked after children in decisions which affect them.

These all have a positive impact on the rate at which LAC young people offend however, nationally, looked after children come into contact with the youth justice system at a higher rate than the general population: 7.3% compared to 3% of all children and young people.

2.2. Lewisham Youth Offending Service (YOS) is the lead multiagency service within the Local Authority responsibility for preventing and reducing reoffending among young people. Lewisham YOS is responsible for overseeing all young people who are resident in Lewisham and who offend, and Lewisham Looked After Children (LAC) young people, regardless of where they reside. Lewisham YOS and Children Social Care work closely together to prevent offending, reoffending and young people becoming victims of crime.

### **3. Statistics**

3.1. Approximately 200 young people are supervised at anyone time by the YOS with 25% of these being LAC young people. Of these approximately 15% are Lewisham LAC young people with the remaining 10% being placed in Lewisham by other Boroughs.

3.2. Lewisham's LAC rates of offending are comparable with other Boroughs although overall reoffending remains higher than the London average for all Lewisham resident YOS caseload.

### **4. Case Management**

4.1. The YOS Service Manager, in partnership with the CSC LAC, Leaving Care and Adoption Manager, undertakes routine case audits of all LAC Offender cases to ensure that the appropriate interventions are being delivered and that all agencies are working together.

4.2. The outcomes of these audits are shared with staff and actions are taken accordingly. These audits have raised most concerns about the placement of young people from other Boroughs to Lewisham due to the increased

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number of agencies involved, the frequency of placement moves for these young people and the lack of engagement in Education, Training and Employment.

- 4.3. Reviewing the Care Plan and YOS Integrated Action Plan, and ensuring that they dovetail, is of paramount importance.
- 4.4. Offence types for LAC young people vary although there remain too many young people who are charged with criminal damage and assault offences within the care home environment. Contact has been made with the various providers to look at the alternatives to criminal proceedings, where the purpose of the police report is to ensure an insurance claim can be made.
- 4.5. Local providers are flagged on the police data system so that the police are aware that young people who may be vulnerable, reside at that address. Restorative Justice training is offered to local carers and providers of local accommodation to LAC young people in order that incidents can be diffused and dealt with restoratively. This will continue to be rolled out over the coming year.

### **5. Training**

- 5.1. Regular training has been provided to foster carers regarding the criminal justice system, how to prevent young people from offending and how to support young people who do offend.
- 5.2. The offer of training and support will continue as this has been well received by those who have attended and positive feedback has been provided, particularly around the Youth Justice System and the role of the Foster Carer as an Appropriate Adult in the police custody suite.

### **6. Court**

- 6.1. Young people who appear in Court are appropriately accompanied by their foster carers, social workers and key workers to court appearances. The only challenge is when young people are arrested some distance from London, for example where they are drug dealing in coastal towns such as Portsmouth.
- 6.2. Where young people are presented in front of the Judge or Magistrates at the start of the day, in Courts far from London or their home address, local Appropriate Adults may be used rather than adults who are known to them. Information is shared appropriately with those Appropriate Adults to inform the outcomes at Court and if possible, a member of local staff will be sent to Court.

### **7. Restorative Justice**

- 7.1. While there are no Lewisham based Children's Homes, Lewisham Council are reviewing the provision that is available locally for young people, particularly those in semi independent and supported accommodation. As part of that, requiring restorative justice trained carers to be a formal requirement of all placements commissioned by the authority, will be further explored. This will contribute to the reduction in the rate of offending and victimisation.

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7.2. Local staff are trained in Restorative Justice and this will be further rolled out across partner agencies.

### **8. Accommodation**

8.1. Research is currently taking place into alternative providers who could deliver intensive foster care placements to young people where their risk of offending or reoffending is high.

8.2. The aim of the provision would be to support the young person to maintain attendance in education, while developing life skills and the ability to live independently

8.3. Restorative justice and crime prevention would be integral to these services.

### **9. Youth Engagement**

9.1. The engagement of young people in service design and delivery is of paramount importance when considering the reduction in youth offending and reoffending. There are two youth participation groups which are engaged in this discussion.

9.2. The YOS Youth Engagement Group is a mixed group of young people, meeting on a fortnightly basis to discuss issues relating to young people who are at risk of offending and who are currently known to the YOS.

9.3. The Children in Care Council has a broader remit with young people who are in Care contributing to discussions on a range of topics. In both forums, reducing the numbers of LAC young people in the youth justice system are addressed although this should be revisited and reviewed.

### **10. Actions**

10.1. The following actions are ongoing and will be addressed as a partnership between the YOS and Children Social Care, the Police, Foster Carers and accommodation providers:

- To improve procedures for young people who are presented in Out of London courts at short notice in order that they have a suitable adult who is known to them. This is particularly the case where young people are found in the coastal towns, charged with drug dealing offences.
- To continue to deliver Restorative Justice training to local providers of accommodation for young people and foster carers
- To continue to deliver Restorative Justice training to staff working with LAC young people.
- To continue to provide foster carers with training around how to prevent young people from offending and what to do if their children offend
- The protocol between Lewisham Council, local police, the youth offending service and residential children's homes providers, is up-to-date and in use. This should clearly set out your authority's expectations for dealing

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with in-home incidents, including when it might be appropriate to involve the police.

- To review the role of the YOS Youth Engagement Group and Children in Care Council, to ensure that young people are having an effective say in the development of crime prevention work aimed at young people in the care system.

For further information please contact Tanya Edwards, Youth Offending Service Manager [tanya.edwards@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:tanya.edwards@lewisham.gov.uk)