

# **MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE**

**Thursday, 21 January 2021 at 7.00 pm**

**PRESENT:** Councillors Luke Sorba (Chair), Caroline Kalu (Vice-Chair), Colin Elliott, Octavia Holland, Liz Johnston-Franklin, Hilary Moore, Jacq Paschoud and Lionel Openshaw, Oluwafela Ajayi (Parent Governor - Special Schools), Monsignor N Rotheron (Catholic Church Representative) and Clive Caseley (Parent Governor - Secondary Schools)

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Sophie Davis (lateness)

**ALSO PRESENT:** Emma Aye-Kumi (Scrutiny Manager), Councillor Chris Barnham (Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Performance), Councillor Amanda De Ryk (Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources), Councillor Bill Brown (Chair of Overview & Scrutiny), Councillor Sophie Davis (Vice Chair Overview & Scrutiny), Pinaki Ghoshal (Executive Director for Children & Young People), Lucie Heyes (Assistant Director of Children's Social Care), Angela Scattergood (Director of Education Services, Education Standards and Inclusion), David Austin (Acting Chief Finance Officer) and Tony O'Sullivan (Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign)

## **1. Minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2020**

- 1.1 The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed participants and the public viewing at home.
- 1.2 The minutes of the last meeting were AGREED without discussion, as a true and accurate record of the proceedings.

## **2. Declarations of interest**

- 2.1 The following interests were declared:
  - Cllr Luke Sorba is the Lewisham Council appointee to the Council of Governors for the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust, and a Member of the Socialist Health Association
  - Cllr Jacq Paschoud is a Member of Socialist Health Association, and a Trustee of a short breaks provider in Lewisham (the Ravensbourne Project)
  - Cllr Liz Johnston-Franklin is the Council representative on the Youth First Board.

## **3. Responses to Referrals to Mayor and Cabinet**

None due.

## **4. Budget cuts**

- 4.1 The Chair reminded the Committee that it could discuss any cut proposal, and was not limited to those relating to the Children and Young People (CYP) Directorate.
- 4.2 Pinaki Ghoshal - Executive Director for Children and Young People introduced the item.
- 4.3 The Chair invited Dr Tony O'Sullivan of the Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign (SLHC) to comment on proposal C-22 "Reduction in LBL contribution to CAMHS service" and any other proposals affecting health services.
- 4.4 Dr O'Sullivan addressed the Committee and made the following points:
1. While the SLHC understood that the pressures were due to the financial cuts imposed by the government on the council, the concern was whether the proposed cuts were deliverable and would be safe for children.
  2. SLHC did not believe that the cuts were safe to make, and stressed the impact on children.
  3. Above all else SLHC urged the council to protect the mental health and safety of children especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.
  4. CAMHS had been historically underfunded in Lewisham. Although wait times for assessment had reduced, wait times for actual therapy remained long and unchanged since 2018.
  5. A high proportion of GP referrals to CAMHS were also turned down because of high thresholds.
  6. Signposting to other services often referred families and young people to organisations that had closed due to funding cuts.
  7. Covid-19 would result in a flood of need.
  8. He implored the council to work with SLHC to campaign against the government cuts.
- 4.5 A discussion followed in which the following was noted:
1. Members were concerned about long waits for treatment, highlighting that a year is a long time in a child's life.
  2. Some members felt that campaigning was unlikely to make a difference to the funding available to the council.
  3. There was recognition of the impact of Covid-19 on child and adolescent mental health. The Chair quoted the Royal College of Psychiatrists who declared the mental health impact of the third lockdown a "national emergency" and that the "impact will last a generation".
  4. The cuts proposals had been drawn up before this lockdown and school closures.
  5. Overall funding for CAMHS had increased from £5m to £7m over the last few years.
  6. The council's financial contribution to CAMHS was small compared to overall CAMHS funding.
  7. The proposed reduction of the council's contribution was offset by a greater increase in NHS funding.

8. Waiting times for treatment were not increasing and the average wait for treatment was 17.4 weeks. Approximately two thirds of GP referrals to the service were being accepted.
9. Although the current lockdown had not been considered when the proposals were drawn up, it was anticipated that although covid would bring about an increase in emotional ill health, most children should not require CAMHS intervention as a result. Lewisham had developed a School's Mental Health Support Team, and was building an early help service. Family therapists and Family Thrive would form part of this offer. The Kooth contract would continue for mainstream mental health support.
10. There were currently no details on NHS investment levels for 2021-22 but indications were that the investment would continue.
11. CAMHS had not seen an increase in referrals resulting from the first lockdown.
12. Members felt that the council should have an estimate of what demand might be to ensure that early intervention services were equipped to cope with the expected increased pressure, and that this should inform any decision to reduce CAMHS funding.
13. Various anecdotes were shared from Committee Members' various personal and professional experiences of seeing the negative impact of the pandemic on children and young people.
14. Members argued that CAMHS referrals are lower when children are not at school. Officers replied that schools are still open to vulnerable children.

### ***C-23 Reduction in the Health Visiting contract***

15. Members expressed concern about the proposal C-23 "Reduction in the Health Visiting contract" , arguing that, according to the Public Health England statistics, Lewisham compares negatively compared to its statistical neighbours on the 6-9 month, 12 month and the 2-2.5 year checks. Also Health Visiting (HV) is funded from the ring-fenced public health budget, and it was not clear where the savings would be redistributed to.
16. Members were also concerned that taking out this universal service would remove the only contact that some families have with statutory services.
17. Members wanted more information on intended reach of the HV service, following the cuts, as well as information on what it would mean in practice for families, considering that the population, and therefore the level of need for the service, was increasing.
18. Officers agreed to provide a comparison of the c. £24m public health spend and proposals for the coming year, and details on the healthy child programme Action – Exec Dir CYP
19. The expectation was that the public health budget of c. £24m would not be cut, but that the HV spend would reduce by c. £350k, releasing the funds for use in part funding the improved early help and prevention offer.
20. The HV service currently carries a significant number of vacancies, the value of which exceeds £350k. The Trust had struggled to recruit band 6 HVs due to a national shortage.

21. Officers explained that if the funding is allocated to the Trust for the HV service and it fails to fill the vacancies, the £350k does not return to the council.
22. Officers anticipated that the cuts would not reduce HV time for families and children, and the council would have the benefit of the reduction in spend rather than the Trust.
23. One Member asked if the council had applied for a s31 grant. Officers explained that s31 was part of the funding that the council received and could not be applied for.

### ***F-23 Home to School Transport***

24. Currently, around one third of the total spend on home to school transport for children with special education needs and disabilities went on taxis.
25. Officers highlighted how complicated home to school transport was but felt the proposed cuts were achievable.

### ***F-19 Reduction in specialist legal advocacy and assessments for CYP proceedings***

26. Regarding the proposal F-19 “Reduction in specialist legal advocacy and assessments for CYP proceedings” costs, better support and assessment and early social worker intervention was leading to reduced legal costs. In the past, the council had been overly dependent on specialist assessments but as the quality of social work was improving, the service was more confident about the assessments it was doing. This proposal would not reduce the service to children and families, but was a result of improved infrastructure. Fewer children coming into care was also leading to fewer proceedings.

4.6 It was PROPOSED, SECONDED and RESOLVED following a unanimous vote that a referral be made to the Mayor & Cabinet via Public Accounts Select Committee in the following terms:

1. “The Committee recommends that the proposal C-23 (that £350,000 of the Health Visitor budget transfers to other parts of the public health budget) is not made in 2021/22, considering the risk to families with children under 2 and Lewisham’s existing poor Healthy Child Programme (HCP) coverage. This would enable: efforts to be made to improve contract management and recruit and retain health visitors. Failing this, Councillors can be presented with a clear plan for support which will be given to families with 0-2 year olds to achieve the goals of the HCP in terms of support and surveillance. The Committee feels strongly that a detailed comparison of the public health budget for 2020/21 and 2021/22 and understanding of prioritisation is necessary to fully understand the impact of the proposal before any decision is made.
2. The Committee, taking into account compelling evidence of the escalating and damaging effect of the Pandemic on children and

young people's mental health, warnings expressed by specialist Health Professionals, Academics, Educators, Charities, Parents and Campaign groups, and the indefinite third national lockdown along with prolonged school closures (which were not anticipated when this proposal was initially drafted) recommends not to go ahead with Proposal C-22 (£250,000 cut in Council contribution to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services) in the financial year 2021/22."

- 4.7 Members praised officers for finding where savings could be made, and recognised that officers had tried hard to mitigate the damage. The Chair thanked Dr O'Sullivan for his contribution to the discussion.

## **5. Corporate Parenting and Children Looked After**

- 5.1 Lucie Heyes - Director of Children's Social Care introduced the report. She highlighted that 76 fewer children were forecast to enter the care system in 2021-22, and a further reduction over next 3 years was projected. Historically, Lewisham had too high a rate of children entering care. The high legacy rate would reduce as children grow up and move out of care. She also explained how covid had impacted the service, and that staff vaccinations were being rolled out so it was hoped that face to face would be resumed shortly.
- 5.2 A discussion followed and it was noted that:
1. Most of Lewisham's children looked after were continuing to attend school throughout the lockdown on the basis that they were vulnerable.
  2. Many care leavers had lost their jobs and NEET figures were negatively affected by covid.
  3. The council had tried to give all children in care and care leavers access to SMART phone or hardware to enable contact with social workers.
  4. Where face to face contact with natural families was not possible, social workers had tried to enable video or phone contact.
  5. Unregulated settings had recently received bad press but not all are bad places to be. There were currently a number of young people in unregulated semi-independent and supported housing arrangements as part of the process of transitioning to independence. These young people have a support package around them. Officers were happy that the placements are of suitable quality and do not use providers that are known to be unsuitable or of poor quality, based on cross borough intelligence.
  6. The council currently has one young person in an unregistered setting and it is in the process of registration. Essentially it is setting up a bespoke children's home for that one child to meet particular needs. The registration process is long, but officers are satisfied that good care is provided and they had a good rationale for using it.
  7. Social workers have a minimum of fortnightly contact with care leavers during the lockdown and every care leaver has an allocated personal advisor. Regular contact is facilitated, but as care leavers are adults, the degree to which they engage is their choice.

8. 1700 digital devices had been received for schools from the Department for Education. The council was seeking to get 2800 more during the current lockdown.

5.3 RESOLVED that the report and comments be noted.

## **6. SEND transition from children's to adults' services**

6.1 Angela Scattergood – Director of Education introduced the item and apologised for the late publication of the report which was delayed because officers were dealing with the demands of the covid response and unexpected closure of schools.

6.2 The Committee was invited to comment or put questions to officers and the following was noted:

1. One Member cautioned against setting up initiatives that cannot be financially supported in the long term, bearing in mind the cuts that the council is having to make.
2. Travel training can be a very long process and needs to start early. Building travel confidence can take a long time, even if the child has the physical or mental capacity to make the journey.
3. The creation of a designated team dealing with transition from children's to adult's services meant that travel training could now be properly programmed, working backwards to when training needs to start.
4. Ideally, employment and work experience opportunities need to be sustainable and local, according to Members. One Member mentioned that Vicky Foxcroft MP was championing inclusion and suggested this might present opportunities for Lewisham's young people with SEND.
5. An officer group had been put in place to review pressure on the High Needs Block (HNB). The overspend on the HNB was due to EHCPs and a 2 year plan was in place to reduce it.
6. The HNB had not had an overspend in recent years, but was predicting to overspend by circa £6m in 2021-22. However this would be offset by an equivalent increase in the Designated Schools Grant (DSG).
7. The Schools Forum had agreed to allocate an additional £1m to the HNB but there would be further pressure in the next financial year. Almost every local authority is overspending on the HNB.
8. Members were pleased to hear that the HNB had not overspent until now.
9. One of the key mitigating factors in reducing the overspend would be reducing the number of children and young people who with EHCPs who go out of the borough for education. To do this there needs to be a comprehensive offer in borough. Good schools partnerships make planning easier.
10. The large rise in EHCPs could be attributed to the 2014 SEND reforms which widened the age gap from 6-16 to 0-25. Lewisham, like other boroughs, was experiencing a rise in EHCPs among the under 5s and over 16s. Also, identification of SEND was improving and parents' expectations had been raised by the SEND reforms.
11. It was expected that the impact of covid and rising poverty would lead to further increases.

- 6.3 RESOLVED that the report and comments be noted. The Committee recorded its thanks to Children and Young People (CYP) officers for their work in responding to the pandemic.

## **7. Select Committee work programme**

- 7.1 The Chair highlighted the three items on the March agenda as:

1. update on safeguarding
2. early help update
3. follow up to the living in temporary accommodation in-depth review, including the overdue formal response to the Mayor and Cabinet referral.

- 7.2 He also explained the following:

1. The Committee had met (online) with the Young Mayor and Advisers in between meetings and was currently working with them to look at ways of increasing participation and engaging them in scrutiny matters.
2. As regards the information item on the work programme “Impact of GCSE algorithm” he explained that the algorithm had been abandoned in favour of teacher assessed grades and that there was insufficient data to report on the impact this had on students’ onward destinations. As a result, this would be removed from the work programme.
3. The item on Elective Home Education would be postponed until the next municipal year.
4. Cllr De Ryk – Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources was invited to speak. She explained that the local government finance agreement gave Lewisham an additional £6m revenue that was not forecasted. This took some of the savings target down.
5. The Committee was invited to attend a meeting of the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee at 7pm on 1 March to jointly consider an item on the Youth Offending Service.

- 7.3 RESOLVED that the work programme be amended to reflect the discussion. The Chair thanked officers and Dr Tony O’Sullivan for their participation in the meeting.

The meeting ended at 9.25 pm

Chair:

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Date:

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