



Children and Young People Select Committee

Annual Children's Social Care report and Progress on Children's Social Care Improvement Programme

Date: 12 January 2023

[Original Submission dated 24/11/22, paper updated for the current meeting]

Key decision: No.

Class: Part 1 (Part 2- Verbal Update)

Ward(s) affected: All

Contributors:

Pinaki Ghoshal, Executive Director Children & Young People's Services

Lucie Heyes, Director Children's Social Care, *with contributions from the Director of Families, Quality & Commissioning and the Director of Education*

Outline and recommendations

This report seeks to provide Members of Children and Young People Select Committee with an overview of safeguarding and corporate parenting social work practice in Children's Social Care (CSC) and an update on the improvement work carried out since last reporting in September 2021. The information in this report is based on the 2021/22 Annual Self-Assessment.

The Committee has requested some verbal feedback from council officers involved in the recent Ofsted inspection of November 2022. This information is exempt so will be provided in a Part 2 session at the end of the meeting. The Committee will be asked to agree the following recommendation:

It is recommended that in accordance with Regulation 4(2)(b) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012 and under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the proposed verbal update from officers on the grounds that it will involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) of the Act, and the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) states that the information is exempt as it is relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

1 Summary

1.1 Children's Social Care Service Improvements

The improvement programme commenced in mid-2018 and the service conducts an annual self-evaluation, which our regulatory body Ofsted scrutinises as part of their inspection processes. Lewisham's last full self-assessment was completed in August 2022, covering the period January 2021 – April 2022. This report summarises the key issues identified in the self-assessment and progress since.

- 1.2 It is important to note that with the development and restructure of the Children and Young People's Directorate, social care for children and young people (CYP) is no longer provided exclusively by the Children's Social Care division. The provision of social work/care takes place via a range of services across all three divisions. The table below summarises where the practice is led from.

Children's Social Care (CSC)	Family, Quality & Commissioning (FQC)	Education
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• MASH• Statutory social work assessments of need• CYP in need of safeguarding and protection• Children Looked After• Care Leavers• Fostering/Carers• Placements for CLA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Early Help – Family Thrive/Family Hubs• Youth Services• Strategic leadership of Contextual Safeguarding• Youth Offending• Quality Assurance i.e. <i>LADO</i> <i>Child Protection Chairs</i> <i>Independent Reviewing Officers</i>• Commissioned services e.g. <i>Advocacy, Independent visiting, young carers, Care Leaver accommodation</i>	CYP in need with complex needs/ disabilities & SEND

- 1.3 This report focuses mainly on the delivery of services by the CSC division, but also includes reference to activities carried out to a greater or lesser extent in the other divisions of the CYP directorate.

2 Recommendations

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

3 Progress on the CSC improvement journey

CSC had previously reported in September 2021 that we were on track to deliver consistently good standards of practice by the end of 2022. However, the chronic impact of the pandemic was unknown and since mid-way through 2021 we have experienced significant staffing challenges, placing caseload capacity pressures on the workforce which has consequently slowed down the pace of improvement.

- 3.1 We know from staff surveys two thirds of the workforce feedback senior managers are accessible, role model a clear vision and there is a supportive climate and a positive learning culture. Staff feel valued, proud and enjoy working for Lewisham (80%). Where we have more to do is on communication and only 45% feel their views are taken into consideration, whilst only 10% actively disagree with both

these things (the remainder were neutral), we would like a bigger proportion actively agreeing.

3.2 The Quality & Improvement Service

This service performs an internal quality assurance (QA) function and was relocated from CSC to FQC in 2021, expanding its remit. Quarterly reports collating learning are used to inform service and workforce planning. This year, caseload pressures have impacted on our capacity to deliver a comprehensive programme of auditing and feedback, or make significant improvements to our performance reporting. We have focused effort on ensuring our bi-annual Listening & Learning practice weeks are intensive periods of QA to review quality and progress at two points in the year, with a focus on thematic audits through the rest of the year.

3.3 Management oversight and supervision

This has been strengthened through embedding a range of management oversight panels, all of which are chaired by a senior manager. Panels require social workers and/or managers to attend and through the regular scrutiny and systematic monitoring these panels provide, we are improving consistency and reducing drift.

3.4 Remote working has made management oversight more challenging. As pandemic restrictions eased we resumed key activities in person and required staff to be in the office for 2-3 days per week minimum. 80% of team meetings and monthly supervisions are now held face to face. We have continued to improve the supervision framework by creating more supportive spaces for reflective thinking, to supplement individual professional supervision. Two thirds of staff report their supervision is regular, reflective and treated as a priority. However we know recording reflective supervision in a timely way still needs improving.

3.5 Workforce – recruitment and retention.

There have been gains and losses in the flexible working arising from the pandemic, whilst providing a healthier work life balance for many, the stresses of living and working through this period has had a chronic impact and has contributed to a national shortage of qualified social workers.

3.6 Lewisham has good commitment from its workforce, our Health-check survey found 62% said it was likely they would be working in Lewisham in 2 years time and our turnover rate is 11%, lower than last year and the inner London average of 17%. Lewisham also has a strong track record of converting agency staff to be permanent, (n.10 in 2021/22). We have held regular recruitment campaigns attracting 26 social workers and 22 NQSW's who started in the ASYE Academy. Despite this, in the context of a national shortage, recruitment has been the biggest challenge we have faced this year.

3.7 At the beginning of 2019, the permanent staffing ratio was 64%, we increased this to 80% in 2020, it has since fallen to 70%. Half of the drop is a direct result of increasing our establishment by two safeguarding teams to meet additional demand. Our agency headcount is comparable within a range of other inner London Boroughs. This has had a significant impact on caseloads and subsequently our ability to sustain the positive trajectory of practice development that we had seen since start the improvement journey. Through mid 2021-22 we have taken a number of actions to improve our position on recruitment, with a specific recruitment and retention plan and a board chaired by the Executive

Director. Actions taken beyond our standard recruitment activities include the introduction of Family Practitioners into frontline teams, a specific agency to permanent recruitment campaign, an extension of the 'refer a friend' scheme and we are also considering the benefits of an overseas campaign.

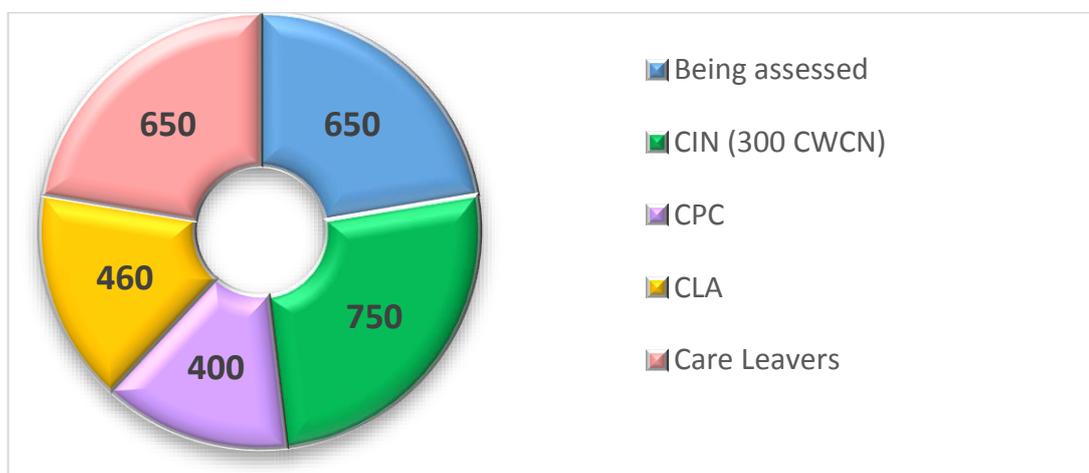
3.8 Workforce learning and development

Our Workforce Development Strategy was published in 2021 followed by our Practice Standards. 80% of practitioners report they understand the practice expectations but also report they need to feel more confident and have more time to put the standards into practice consistently. Learning and development activities through 2021 were restricted to being delivered online, diluting the impact. Remote working also presented real challenges for student placements and NQSWs. This has constrained us from driving up skills development across the workforce. Since April 2022 most training delivery has resumed in person. Through 2022/23 we are delivering a tailored intensive Signs of Safety training programme that will be in person for all staff, with the intention of further embedding practice quality.

3.9 The CSC recording systems – LCS, EHM and ControCC

These systems require continuous adaptation as practice evolves. Improvement work in 2021 focused on a rebuild of the ControCC finance system. LCS has undergone two phases of redesign and phase 3 commenced in September 2022.

4 **The Children and Young people Children's Social Care are working with**



Data Source: LCS August 2022.

Key:

CIN	Children in Need
CWCN	Child with Complex Needs
CPC	Children subject to Child Protection plans
CLA	Children Looked After (in care)

4.1 Since the onset of the pandemic, data trends have been atypical. Initially in 2020, CSC accepted fewer referrals, to focus limited staffing to children requiring safeguarding, however later in the year, especially as more CYP returned to being at school, demand for CSC services started to increase and an upward trend continued throughout 2021-2022, it was not until midway through 2022 that we have seen demand levelling out, albeit at the higher levels of need. The increased demand is volume, but also greater complexity and seriousness in families, which Ofsted has described as 'hidden harm' arising out of lockdown. In particular we

have noted greater levels of need in children’s mental and emotional wellbeing/health. CSC are working with approximately 200 more CYP at any one time than in 2019, half of that relates to more need/safeguarding, the other half relates to high numbers of care leavers.

- 4.2 Benchmarking against other London Boroughs, in 2021 there was a marginal increase in referrals and child protection activity (s47) compared to pre-pandemic levels, which has since fallen back in 2022. However not all London Boroughs including Lewisham have seen the fall. Lewisham’s referral and s47 rate is in the top quartile in London. Lewisham also has the 2nd highest rate of Looked After Children in London, arising from the legacy of historical practice and insufficient preventative/family support services in the past. Across London the rate of care leavers has significantly increased and Lewisham has the 5th highest rate (18-21 years old) in London.
- 4.3 Throughout 2021/22 we have continued to work with CYP and families face to face wherever possible, with virtual visits by exception and meetings operating remotely, or as a hybrid. Despite the context, we have continued to embed Signs of Safety (SoS) practice, expanding and diversifying our preventative/family support service and introducing new protocols to improve our court work. Combined, this has enabled us to support more CYP to stay safely with their families, reducing the numbers subject to court proceedings and entering care. That trend is expected to continue through this year, as the table below shows in our activity forecasting.

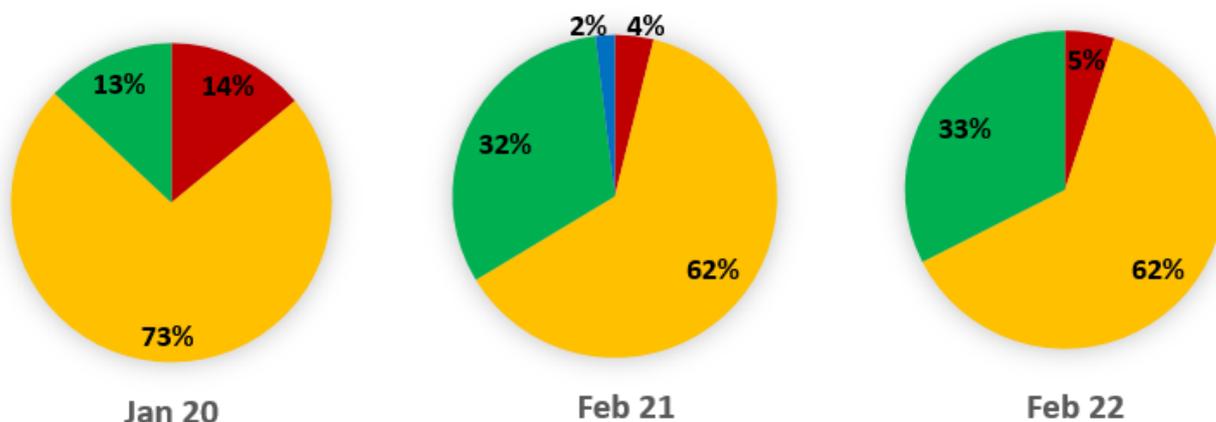
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Difference from 2019/20	2022/23 Q1 & 2	EOY Forecast
Referrals to CSC	3874	3153	4365	+491 (13%) ↑	2130	4400 →
CYP open to CSC total (EOY)	2590	2660	2800	+210 (8%) ↑	2900	2850 →
Assessments completed	4181	3711	4825	+644 (15%) ↑	2195	4400 ↓
CYP placed on CPP	326	336	458	+132 (40%) ↑	189	390 ↓
Court applications (families)	55	68	52	-3 (%) →	26	52 →
CYP entering care	218	179	218	0 →	87	170 ↓
Net rate of CYP in care (EOY)	69	69	70	+1 →	66	65 ↓
Net no. CYP in care	473	482	480	+7 (1%) →	467	450 ↓
						Arrows in last column compare with 2019/20

- 4.4 The caseload pressures arising as a consequence of increasing demand and staffing shortages, have been acutely felt since mid 2021 and the impact can be seen across several areas of performance and practice over the last 12 months. We have not been able to sustain the positive trajectory of practice improvement that we saw through 2019 to mid 2021.
- 4.5 Section 4 provides an overall summary of practice and performance across all service areas in CSC. Sections 5 and 6 provide more detail of our annual self assessment of practice across the safeguarding teams and in corporate parenting.

5 An overall picture of practice

This section gives a summary of practice and performance. In summary, through

2019 - 2020 we saw a marked improvement in quality, with 20% more practice judged as good and 10% less practice considered inadequate. However through 2021-22 some of our key performance indicators have dipped in varying degrees, but we have not seen a notable deterioration in the quality of direct practice according to audit findings, here there has been little change, with broadly one third of practice judged as good and two thirds requiring improvement to be good.



Key for rating/grade:	Outstanding	Good	Requires improvement	Inadequate
-----------------------	-------------	------	----------------------	------------

MEASURES OF SUCCESS	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23 Q1-2	Target
% Re-referrals.	15	18	20	20	21	<20
% MASH decision in 24 hours.	80	93	93	93	96	>90
% Assessments within 45 days	80	79	90	87	77	>90
% CIN visits in timescale - FSS (4 weekly – note there is no statutory timescale for visits, 6 weekly is the general guide)	-	-	79	66	70	>90
% CP visits in timescale (2 weekly – note the statutory minimum is 4 weekly))	-	40	75	67	71	>90
Rate of CPP for 2 nd /subsequent time	13	24	18	17	TBC	<20
% of CPP lasting + 2 years	0.4	1.1	1.2	2	4	<2
% Core Group Meetings in timescale (12 weekly)	-	64	69	62	67	>80
% CLA visited in timescale (6 weekly)	-	84	90	85	78	>90
% CLA 3+ placements	9	6	7	10	11	<10
% CLA in same placement 2+ years	70	71	71	75	75	>70
% CLA placed 20+ miles from home	17	20	20	19	19	<18
% Care leavers in EET (18-21 yrs)	49	55	57	55	52	>60
% Care leavers suitable accommodation	76	86	92	92	93	>85
% Care leavers visits in timescale (8 weekly)	-	58	88	80	61	>85

More information is provided in the following sections to provide further context to this performance indicator table.

6 Safeguarding Children and Young People

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is a multi-disciplinary service, managed within CSC, MASH receives all contacts on CYP for whom there may be a welfare need or safeguarding concern. They review and action all new contacts

within 1 day of receipt, advising professionals and directing families onto the most appropriate level service.

- 6.1 MASH has sustained consistently good performance on timeliness (>90%) and quality on decisions making over the last two years. The Out of Hours Emergency Duty Team (EDT) which operates for Children and Adults services has been subject to some changes in practice this year, to better connect practice to the MASH. CSC is currently reviewing the best way to expand the EDT team, recognising current staffing establishment does not provide sufficient capacity to deliver a service that can respond to the needs of CYP and Adults simultaneously. It is an ambition for Lewisham in 2024 to transform the MASH and EDT into a single point of contact for a broader range of CYP Services (e.g. Including CAMHS). The early stages of planning for this started in autumn 2022.
- 6.2 Our partnership working with Police, Health, Education and Housing is a strength. The addition of a permanent education lead, CSC having a regular presence at Lewisham education meetings and the innovation pilot where a Social Worker supervises safeguarding leads in schools has led to closer working relationships with schools. Extended responsibilities of the Virtual School have also been welcomed and a Deputy Head for Children in Need (CIN) was appointed. Collaborative working between Housing and CSC through 2021 led to the creation of a joint protocol, co-locating professionals in MASH and improving processes for assessing and helping homeless CYP and families, including those with no recourse to public funds.
- 6.3 The CSC Assessment Service has been managing significant caseload pressures throughout 2021-22 which has impacted on its performance. We continue to ensure all CYP are allocated to a social worker within a day, however the timeliness of visits needs to be improved. We are maintaining reasonable performance on completing the child's assessment within 45 days, whilst just below our target we are comparable with other London Boroughs. The most challenging area has been in the provision of support to children in need following the statutory assessment, social workers with limited capacity have to prioritise child protection and court activity and Early Help services are still maturing.
- 6.4 We have seen a significant increase in child protection enquiries started and CYP subject to child protection plans. Some of the increase relates to higher levels of need in the Borough, however we believe there are other local drivers contributing to the safeguarding numbers, which relate to the impact of staffing turnover and caseload pressures, leading to heightened levels of professional anxiety across the system. We have taken deliberate action to stabilise staffing, thresholds and resume risk sensible practice across the safeguarding teams. The service continues to promptly identify and respond to risk of harm, Section 47 child protection strategy meetings happen in a timely manner and the majority include key professionals from the multiagency network.
- 6.5 Lewisham's strategic and operational approach to adolescent extra-familial risk has been subject to review this year, precipitated by the publication of Pan London Child Exploitation protocol and the creation of the FQC division. The Lewisham Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) has adapted the former model known as the Concern Hub and introduced Multi-Agency Child Exploitation procedures (MACE) which are commonly used across London.

- 6.6 The Safe Space Service in CSC is a dedicated team working alongside the Police, Youth Offending and Violence Reduction Team for CYP aged 11 – 18 who are experiencing extra familial harm. This year in parallel with the strategic developments noted above, CSC refreshed the missing procedures in collaboration with the Police. Lewisham now has a small dedicated missing team, with practitioners who specialise in conducting return home interviews (RHIs).
- 6.7 In the previous year there were fewer incidents of missing, which is a trend seen across the country and was the impact of lockdown rules temporarily restricting people's movements. It is not possible to compare figures with time periods pre-pandemic because our recording systems have since been changed. RHI's are now routinely offered to CYP within 72 hours of being located, this year take up rate was 57%, a marked improvement on previous years.
- 6.8 The Lewisham Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Strategy runs from 2022-23. CYP Services are currently reviewing the strategy and the Lewisham adolescent offer, with a view to strengthening the prevention and targeted support available to CYP at risk of exploitation and those who need support with mental/emotional health and wellbeing. The support for adolescents currently sits in different teams such as the Youth Offending Service, CSC, Community Safety and Youth Services, and the review will look to align the offer to improve access and earlier help.
- 6.9 The Family Support & Safeguarding Service works with medium/long term children in need (CIN) and CYP subject to child protection plans and court proceedings. Caseload pressures were felt most acutely in this service and managers have had to prioritise navigating this and mitigating the impact, therefore again here this has impacted on performance. Senior managers anticipated higher caseloads which could lead to more drift and so increased oversight of those CYP open to the service over 9 months. We did have a small increase (2%) of children in need open over 2 years, but while 122 more CYP were made subject to child protection plans, the number on plans for more than 1 year has not significantly increased.
- 6.10 The legacy of the pandemic is keenly felt in this part of the service, significant delays in court arising from the need for proceedings to be held virtually during lockdown, have added significant caseload and financial pressures in several ways. The national average for proceedings has risen from 36 weeks in 2019, to 46 (2022), with many cases extending well beyond the average. The protracted nature of the court processes has meant that despite having very low numbers entering proceedings, we have a higher net number of families in proceedings and CYP remaining in care for longer. Social workers are required to spend more intensive time in court and on associated activity and from a financial perspective, more expert assessments are directed and additional legal advocacy /representation arise, at significant cost to the Local Authority.
- 6.11 In 2020 Lewisham successfully bid for What Works Centre innovation funding to pilot the introduction of a Domestic Abuse (DA) advisory hub to deliver training and create specialist workers. The external evaluation is still underway, but our internal analysis found very positive impact. Social workers reported higher levels of confidence dealing with DA. Of the 95 CYP considered at the DA Hub for half the families there was an increase in safety for the CYP and/or victim.
- 6.12 The Children With Complex Needs Service (CWCN), sits within the Education division to be closely connected to SEND and health services. Learning from

historical serious case reviews there has been an emphasis on partnership working. Care Packages for CWCN are discussed at a multi-agency panel to ensure appropriate outcome orientated services are in place. Adult Services are also on this panel to support transition planning. CWCN have also prioritised CYP identification and protocols for CWCN on rescue medication.

6.13 Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI), November 2022.

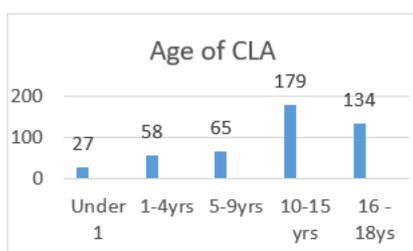
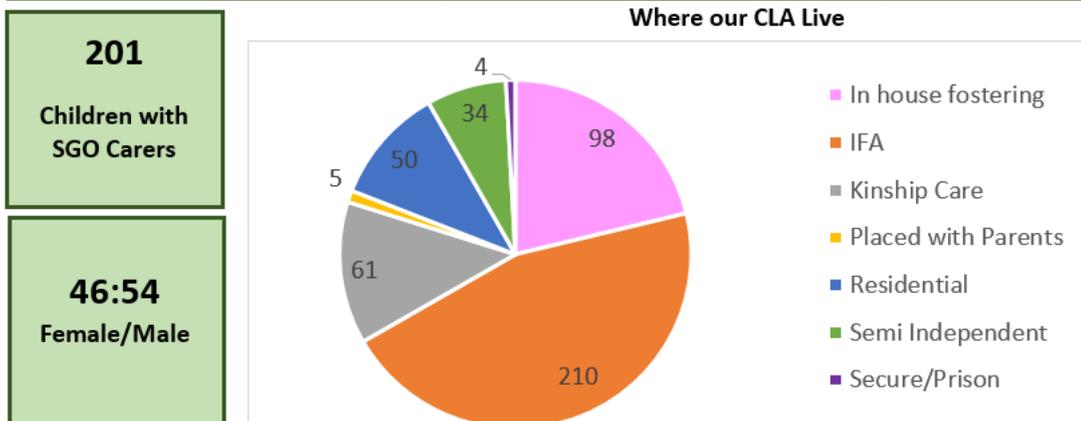
In November 2022, Lewisham was subject to a JTAI. This methodology of inspection is multi-agency, involving three national inspectorates i.e. Ofsted for Local Authority - CYP Services & Education. CQC for Health and HMIC for Police. JTAI inspections are unannounced, they take place over three weeks, they focus on a specific theme of practice and do not provide a judgement, they present findings and make recommendations.

- 6.14 Lewisham's theme was the 'identification of initial need and risk', which for the Local Authority, includes targeted Early Help, the MASH and CSC safeguarding teams. For Schools, the scope is narrowly focused on Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) role, exclusions and elective home education. In Health the 'front door' includes aspects of Accident and Emergency, School Nursing, Midwifery, Health Visiting and CAMHS. In the Police, the Borough Command Unit working with Child Protection, Family Violence and Exploitation are the focus. [Joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to identification of initial need and risk - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-targeted-area-inspection-of-the-multi-agency-response-to-identification-of-initial-need-and-risk)
- 6.15 At the time of writing this report we have not yet received the formal feedback letter and so are unable to comment of the specifics of the inspection. However the verbal feedback received was in line with what we had anticipated and we were pleased with the comments made by inspectors during the inspection. As expected they identified areas for improvement, but these were in areas we had already identified.

7 Corporate Parenting of our Children in Care (Looked After) & Care Leavers

Data as at August 2022. Provided to October Corporate Parenting Board.

455 (r66) Children Looked After (CLA)	77 Admissions into care (5 months)	65 Exits from care (5 months)	75% Subject to a court order	18 adopted (YTD) 3 awaiting
---	--	---	--	--



Ethnic background

	All CLA	Not UASC	UASC
White	27%	28%	12%
Mixed	29%	31%	9%
Asian or Asian British	6%	3%	33%
Black or black British	33%	35%	12%
Other ethnic group	5%	3%	35%
Not stated	0%	0%	0%
Not recorded	0%	0%	0%

60 children (13%) with a disability

668 Care leavers 40:60 Female/Male	94% Living in suitable accommodation	76% Up to date Pathway Plan	96% In touch	263 (39%) Live in the borough	58% (18-20) 47% (21+) In EET
--	--	---------------------------------------	------------------------	---	--

7.1

Through 2021-22 we have been focused on delivering the 6 key aims of our Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-24 and awareness raising of Corporate Parenting responsibilities. Progress is monitored by the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB), which has a structure and forward plan constructed around the pledge in our strategy. The Child in Care Council (CICC) lead the first section of the CPB and the Lead Member for CYP services chairs.



7.2 Lewisham's Child in Care Council (CICC)

Elevation is the name of our CICC group for older CYP. The CICC are engaged in activities to bring young people together, celebrating successes and especially during the pandemic CICC provided much needed peer support. Regrettably, challenges in appointing a replacement participation officer to manage the CICC has meant we have been unable to facilitate an active CICC for the latter part of 2022. We still have much to do to strengthen our participation work and plans this year to bring together the Young Mayors Team with our participation officer is a step towards this. We are looking at a range of ways to create more spaces to give CYP a voice in service evaluation, design and become engaged in delivery. For example we aspire to have care experienced person as an ambassador and chairing the CPB, mentors and young inspectors.



7.3 The numbers of CYP in Care

The rate of CYP *entering care*, has fallen from 31 in 2019/20 to 21 (Q1 22/23) and is now below the London average and the net number (455) and rate of CYP *in care* (67) has fallen for the first time in several years, but still remains much higher than our Statistical Neighbours (r59), and the London average (r50) which continues to be a legacy from historic practice. The numbers leaving care to go home, or onto other forms of care e.g. special guardianship or adoption has also decreased this year, partly due to challenges created by the pandemic, but we still need to improve the timeliness of our permanence planning, build our adolescent service to support rehabilitation home options and strengthen our connected care support to help more extended family care for adolescents.

We anticipate the net number of CYP in care will continue to steadily reduce, because we are seeking fewer court orders and we know there is a wave of legal proceedings subject to delays in the family courts that will conclude in 2022-23, plus nearly a third of our care population are aged 16 and 17. However we are mindful that the increased requirement for Local Authorities to accommodate more Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) will impact on this. For Lewisham it means our UASC quota has increased from 47 to 69 CYP.

7.4 The demographic characteristics of our CYP in care

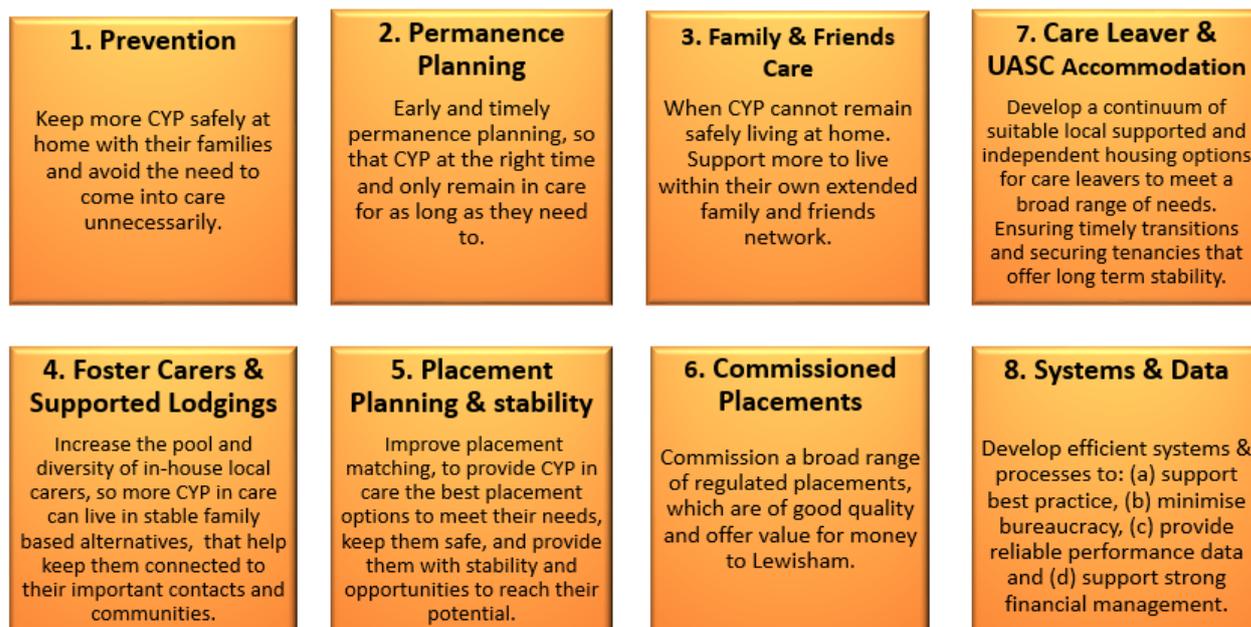
This remains largely unchanged from last year. Our age profile largely mirrors the national picture, 69% of our CYP are of secondary school age. Ethnically, we have an 8% less white CYP in care than in the local school pupil population and CYP of mixed heritage are over represented by 10% which is in contrast to a lower representation in safeguarding, other ethnic groups are largely representative of the local population. The data is not precise enough for us to know the exact make up of those who are mixed heritage and whether there is a particular group that are disproportionately represented. This is something we are seeking to better understand as part of our work promoting anti-racist practice.

7.5 Where our CYP in care live

Three quarters live in a foster placement, of which 14% are with a connected carer (family/friend), a 2% increase from 2020/21. This profile is comparable with other LA's, however, we are over-reliant on obtaining foster placements from Independent Fostering Agency's (IFAs), with only 20% living with Lewisham Foster Carers. 10% (No.47) of our CYP are in residential care, which is in line with others and has been steady in number. The proportion of CYP placed at a distance from home is comparable with other London Boroughs, but we have had a 5% increase in CYP placed outside of the Borough this year, as a consequence of local placement shortages. This presents additional challenges to ensure CYP have equitable access to services and creates increased cost pressures arising for example from transportation to and from visiting family and attending school or clubs, in order to maintain local connections.

- 7.6 Placement stability is a mixed picture, CYP in the same placement for 2 years + is up 8% and above the national average. But CYP who have had 3+ placements in the last year has increased by 2%, we believe this is connected to the complexities and behavioural challenges presented by some of our CYP in care and the nationwide shortage of placements.
- 7.7 Placement Sufficiency continues to be significant challenge for Local Authorities and Lewisham is no exception. For adolescents entering care there are now rarely well matched placements available, it is common for us to have to place CYP in the one available placement, compromising our ability to consider issues such as locality to school. Combined with a shortage of placements, there are increasingly CYP whose need are so challenging that we have had no available placements. In these circumstances we have no option but to create temporary bespoke unregulated individual arrangements, whilst we locate a regulated provision.
- 7.8 Creating interim arrangements is unsuitable and destabilising for CYP, extremely time consuming for CSC services and exceptionally costly to the Local Authority. Despite the numbers of CYP *entering* and *in care* falling and the proportion of CYP in residential care remaining steady, placement (an associated) costs are rising, in part due to market forces and inflation, but also because of the increasing complexities of the CYP coming into care. A particular trend we have noticed in 2022 is the need for care for adolescents with significant mental/emotional health difficulties and an absence of suitable health orientated facilities upon hospital discharge. Last year we had 3 CYP in placements costing over £10,000 per week, now we have 8. This is putting additional pressure on the placements budget.
- 7.9 We have been working tirelessly on our Placement Sufficiency Strategy which sets out 8 key aims. Additional senior management and commissioning capacity has been brought in to deliver the strategic aims at pace and a board chaired by the Executive DCS oversees the progress of the work. We are making headway, but many of the activities are medium or long term in nature. There are not quick or easy fixes, many aspects of the placements crisis are beyond our control. We anticipate announcements from central government in early 2023, in response to two major national reviews on the placements crisis and the delivery of CSC services, which it is hoped will lead to improvements.

7.10 Our Sufficiency Strategy aims:



7.11 Key achievements on sufficiency strategy so far:

- ✓ **Prevention:** Expanding intensive Meliot Family Support Service and applying Signs of Safety to reduce numbers of CYP entering care unnecessarily.
- ✓ **Permanence:** Introducing new processes for permanence planning for CYP to exit care quickly into other care arrangements e.g. Connected care or Adoption
- ✓ **Family & Friends:** Developing our Connected Carer Service to support more families to look after CYP as an alternative to care.
- ✓ **UASC and care leavers:** Joint CSC & Housing protocols put in place and new pathways commissioned to expand the continuum of accommodation.
- ✓ **Foster carers:** Refreshing communication strategy for recruitment of foster carers. and opening Bromley Road building as a training and support hub.
- ✓ **Placement Planning/stability:** Creating provider forums and focus days on hard to place CYP, to build partnerships with trusted local providers to build Lewisham specific provision
- ✓ **Commissioning:** Changing arrangements to join a London regional commissioning alliance for placements.
- ✓ **Systems/Data:** Mapping the re-designing of LCS placements and care pathway, to streamline practice and financial processes, to improve tracking and forecasting.

7.12 Children in Care - Meetings and visits

Over 90% of our Looked After Review meetings are held in timescale, similar to the previous year and in line with others. We have made administrative changes to improve the timeliness of our Initial Health assessments, but this continues to be an area for improvement, whereas 90% of Review Health Assessments are held within timescale. The pandemic had a significant impact on dental reviews with only 51% completed in timescale, however this was 10% above the national average. The performance indicator table shows that timeliness of visiting has dropped this year, for caseload/capacity reasons already noted.

7.13 Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) have been taking steps to actively increase their footprint and are now more involved in management oversight panels where care, placement and permanence planning is monitored. IRO use of escalations has been deliberately increased to contribute to practice improvement. 129 monitoring notices were raised regarding delay/drift and 42 stage 1 escalations. Areas for improvement identified are; timeliness and quality of pre-meeting reports and care plans, delays in permanence planning, addressing vulnerability in the community, payments to connected carers, transfers and earlier allocation of personal advisors. Meetings are routinely held between IRO's, managers in CSC, YOS and the Advocacy service to address issues raised.

7.14 Permanence Planning

Through 2021/22 CSC took a number of steps to improve our permanence planning, streamlining processes, strengthening management oversight, expanding our Connected Carer team and increasing support packages for kinship carers. The impact of all this has been we have reduced drift and formalised arrangements through fostering panel more promptly. We increased connected (kinship) carer placements from 38 in 2020/21 to 69 this year and 28 CYP progressed from care into SG arrangements. Also 37% of those leaving care returned to live with family, 7% more than the previous year. We know there is more improvement to do in this area, this is set out in our Sufficiency Strategy.

We continue to work closely with the Regional Adoption Agency. The quality assurance group that oversees operational practice has established itself leading on practice improvements e.g. increasing the recruitment of BAME adopters and the Board in pro-actively engaged in steering the strategic direction.



7.15 While we have experienced a very challenging period, in July 2021 Ofsted completed a focused visit on CYP in care to seek assurance of improvement activity since their last ILACS inspection in July 2019. Ofsted's feedback was...

" Since 2019, and despite the significant impact of the pandemic, the senior leadership team has improved services for children in care. Senior leaders demonstrate a clear focus on hearing the voices of children and have a clear understanding of areas for development that are being appropriately addressed"... "Social workers know their children well and are passionate advocates"... "Children said that they feel valued by their carers and are being well supported". <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80508>

7.16 **Supporting and preparing our care leavers**



Note: Care Leaver data from June 2022

- 7.17 There have been many improvements in our Care Leaver/UASC Service through 2021, we believe we are making good progress delivering against the 'Keep on Caring' outcomes. We have revised our local offer and financial entitlements policy, completely redesigned our savings processes. To improve access to health support, we have introduced a jointly funded care leaver nurse post. The service moved into a refurbished building at Bromley Road in July 2022 and our intention is to provide an accessible and safe 'one stop shop' location for our care leavers.
- 7.18 Through collaborative work between CSC, Adults Commissioning and Housing Services, we have increased housing pathways for care leavers assisted by a dedicated housing officer matching YP to suitable accommodation and support. As part of our Sufficiency Strategy we are also identifying buildings which we plan to re-purpose, to create more capacity in 2023. We are just above the London average for care leavers in suitable accommodation.
- 7.19 Lewisham worked closely with Depaul on the I-Aspire programme between March 2018 - 2022. I-Aspire supported 152 Lewisham care leavers with ETE. There were 81 new starts in employment, 52 new starts on education or training and 41 have gained a level 1, 2 or 3 qualification, 13 have begun university or HE. As the programme drew to a close we have worked closely with Lewisham Works, DWP and the Virtual School, to transition this support. Lewisham is above the London average for Care Leavers in ETE.
- 7.20 We are now focusing on improving pathway planning at an earlier stage, a specific, supported, ring-fenced apprenticeship offer, transitions to adults services and achieving better mental-health outcomes. In July 2022 the care leaver service was assessed by Mark Riddell, who is care experienced and an advisor to the Department of Education on Care Leavers. Mark's feedback was positive i.e.

"Lewisham have acknowledged that they are on a journey of continuous improvement. The pandemic has placed huge demand on services and its impact is well understood...The local authority are clear what things are now needed to restart the care leavers improvement journey...The Corporate Parenting Board has a really good buy-in from elected members and I was able to see a developing Partnership Offer.

I got a real sense that personal advisers and managers are and want to make things happen for their care leavers...Housing came across as a very strong offer The health offer was good in that there is a nurse placed within leaving care which is exceptional practice"

- 7.21 Mark also commented that he was *“less able to see what the Adult Transition Offer... This was similar for mental health.”* He made a number of recommendations, we are currently exploring the feasibility of implementation.

8 CSC improvement programme & priorities for the next 12 months

The combined external endorsement and consistent feedback of (a) the unpublished Ofsted JTAI inspection on safeguarding in November 2022, (b) the Ofsted Focused Visit on CYP in care, in July 2021, and (c) Mark Riddell’s review of Care Leaver services in July 2022. Reaffirms that we know the service well, we are doing the right things and despite the challenges that we continue to face, particularly on staffing and in care placements, we continue to be on a positive improvement trajectory.

- 8.1 There is clearly more to do before we are delivering consistently good practice to all our CYP and families. Post pandemic with a stronger joined up approach across CYP and Adults services, clear strategic direction, stable leadership, more effective systems and a good workforce development approach. We are confident that we will recover the lost ground on performance, regain momentum on practice improvement and remain on course to deliver our vision. In 2023, for CSC we are focusing on the following for our continued improvement:

1. Deliver the Workforce Development Strategy to:
 - Reduce caseloads through a range of recruitment & retention activities
 - Resume in person learning and development activities
 - Introduce monthly frontline managers ‘practice improvement’ sessions
 - Deliver mandatory intensive SoS training for all staff
 - Extend our ‘Thinking Spaces’ to create more reflective opportunities to work with complex cases and plan purposeful interventions.
2. Strengthen oversight to ensure resources are targeted at the most vulnerable
3. Introduction of Family Practitioners into frontline teams
4. Continued development of the Meliot Family Support Centre, to support more CYP to live/return safely in their families.
5. Deliver Corporate Parenting Strategy to improve the experience of our CYP in and after care.
6. Deliver Sufficiency Strategy to improve placement options for CYP in care.
7. LCS system redesign phase 3 to further streamline recording processes.

In addition, across the CYP directorate, developments in Early Help services, the creation of an adolescent service and improvements to our performance reporting capabilities will further support the delivery of better services for CYP and families in Lewisham.

9 Financial implications

A report to Public Accounts Scrutiny Committee presented in September 2022, sets out CSC position on the budget and progress against savings targets.

10 Legal implications

The recommendations in this report have been considered, and observations have been included in the report. Members are asked to note that The Council must comply with its statutory duties to children and families, in particular those arising under the Children Act 1989 as amended, the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and related legislation, Regulations and Statutory Guidance.

11 Equalities implications

Addressing inequalities, especially those impacting upon our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, is a key priority for the Council and its partners. This focus has been sharpened in response to the disproportionate impact that COVID-19 has had on these communities. Any changes to services originating from the improvement plans will need to be mindful of this, with a thorough consideration of the equality implications for our most vulnerable residents alongside appropriate mitigation to reduce any negative impacts.

12 Climate change and environments implications

There are no anticipated climate change and environmental implications arising from this report. However, any proposed service changes or recommendations must be mindful of the Council's intention of becoming a carbon neutral borough by 2030 and observe our commitments in the Climate Emergency Action Plan that was agreed by Mayor and Cabinet in March 2020.

13 Crime and disorder implications

The work being undertaken on the exploitation strategy aims to contribute to a reduction in crime in the Borough.

14 Health and wellbeing implications

The improvements in services aim to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for our residents.

15 Background papers

See reference to the September 2022 PASC report and October 2022 Corporate Parenting Board report.

16 Report author and contact

Lucie Heyes, Director Children's Social Care.
Pinaki Ghoshal, Executive Director Children & Young People's Services.