



Children and Young People Select Committee

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

Date: 23/11/2023

Key decision: No.

Class:

Ward(s) affected: All

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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 Families Quality and Commissioning (FQC). Since last reporting in November 2022.

1 Summary

1.1 It is important to note that following the restructure of the Children and Young People's Directorate in 2021, 'social care' for children and young people (CYP) is no longer provided exclusively by the CSC division. The provision of social work/social care takes place across a range of teams and services in 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Early Help – Family Thrive/Family Hubs• Youth Services• Contextual Safeguarding• Youth Justice	CYP in need with complex needs/ disabilities (CWCN) & SEN

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CYP in need of safeguarding and protection • CYP in care • Care Leavers • Fostering/Carers • Placements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality Assurance i.e. <i>LADO Child Protection Chairs Independent Reviewing Officers</i> • Commissioned services e.g. <i>Advocacy, Independent visiting, young carers, Care Leaver accommodation</i> 	<p><i>NOTE: In August The CWCN service transferred on an interim basis from the Education Division to CSC.</i></p>
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1.2 The information in this report is based on the Annual Self-Assessment, which covers the period April 2022 – March 2023 and then provides a summary update on the six months since, between April – September 2023.

2. What is the overall quality of our practice and how do we know.

2.1 Quality Assurance (QA) Mechanisms

We measure the quality of practice through a combination of our auditing schedule, key performance indicators, practice observation, management oversight/supervision and feedback, from the CYP and families we provide services for and from partners and practitioners working with CYP. (CSC conducts an annual employee health check survey).

2.2 The QA service (located in FQC) performs an internal QA function amongst other responsibilities. A monthly auditing schedule and bi-annual Listening & Learning practice weeks are part of a comprehensive QA framework. Quarterly QA reports compile and analyse the findings from all the QA mechanisms, the learning is then disseminated to inform service and workforce planning. During 2022-2023, QA activity is summarised as follows:

- 125 full case audits across CSC/FQC and Targeted Early Help (Family Thrive Service). Reviewing case records, discussion with the allocated practitioner/s and feedback from the CYP and their family is obtained wherever possible.
- 15 multi-agency partnership audits took place through the Local Children's Safeguarding Partnership (LSCP).
- Approximately 500 audit/thematic case reviews took place examining a range of specific areas of practice.
- A comprehensive review of CYP receiving services from Targeted Early Help Family Thrive took place.
- Feedback from 50 CYP and/or their parents/carers was obtained during the last Listening and Learning week, as well as learning gained from complaints.

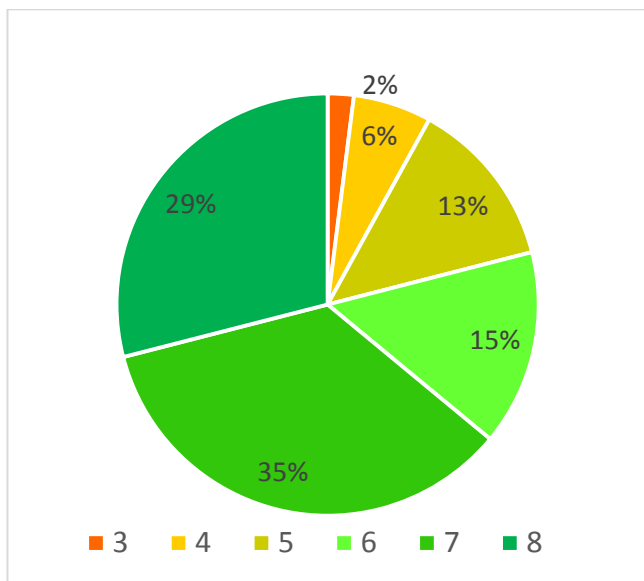
2.3 The journey of practice improvement

At the start of the CSC improvement journey in mid-late 2018, the vast majority of social work practice required significant improvement. After a year of development, the proportion of practice judged to be good had increased but through 2020-2021 in the context of Covid-19, the pace of improvement inevitably slowed. Emerging out of the pandemic in late 2022, the 2022/23 Annual Self-Assessment concluded that conditions for practice to thrive are now established in CSC, performance is

stronger and in audit the majority of practice is now judged to be good.

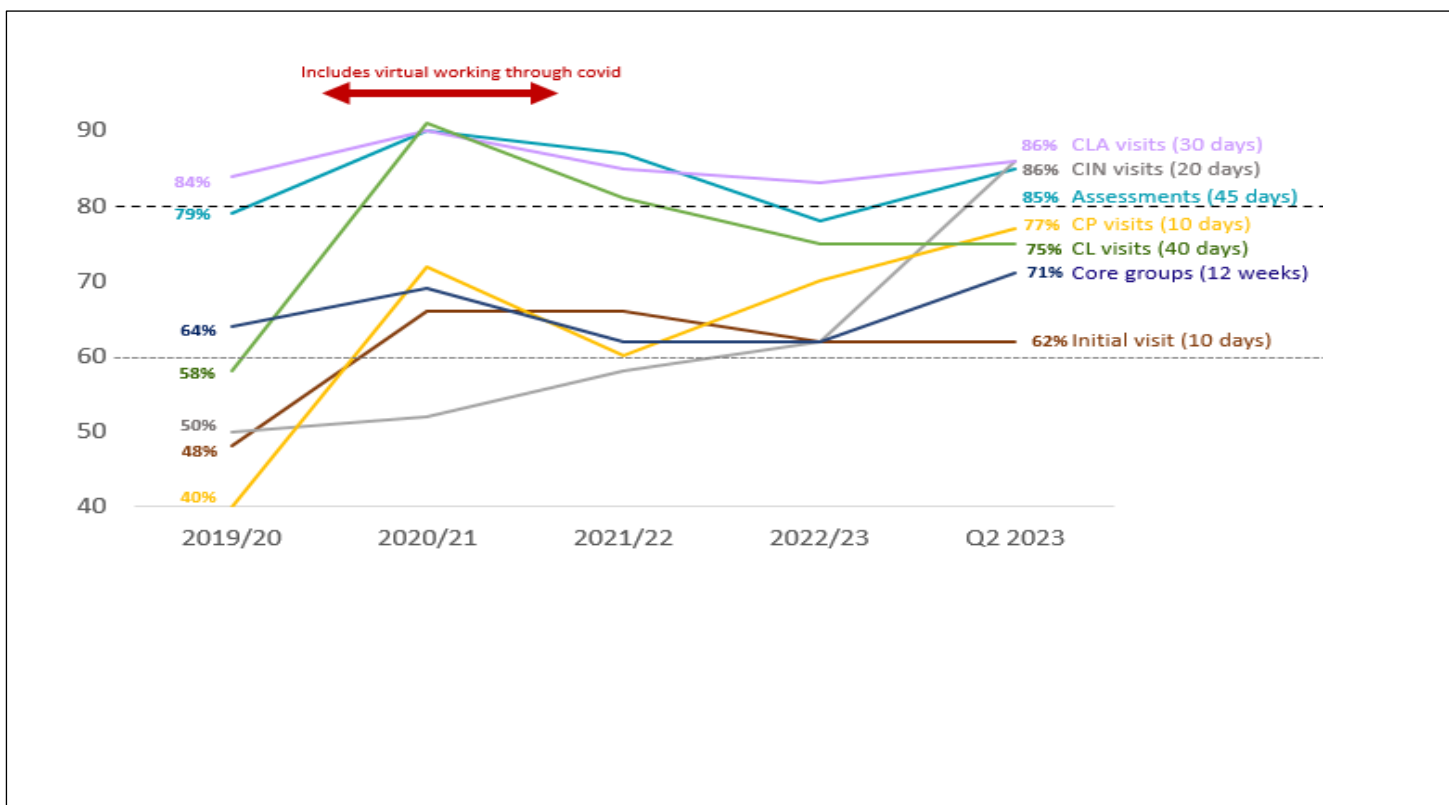
2.4 The remit of the improvement programme was widened, following the creation of FQC in 2021 and services in the FQC division are in an earlier phase of improvement than in the CSC division. The targeted early help offer 'Family Thrive' is in its infancy having only been brought 'in-house' in January 2021, but there have already been significant improvements, recognised in the Ofsted JTAI inspection in (November 2022) <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50206436>. More CYP are now receiving effective help earlier and fewer are needing to be 'stepped up' to statutory CSC services.

2.5 Audit gradings and key performance indicators across CYP Services



We apply a SoS scale judgement to audit grades. 0 is considered unsafe and 10 is outstanding practice. At the commencement of the CSC improvement programme in 2019 only 13% of practice was judged as good. Through 2020 and 2021 this increased to a third.

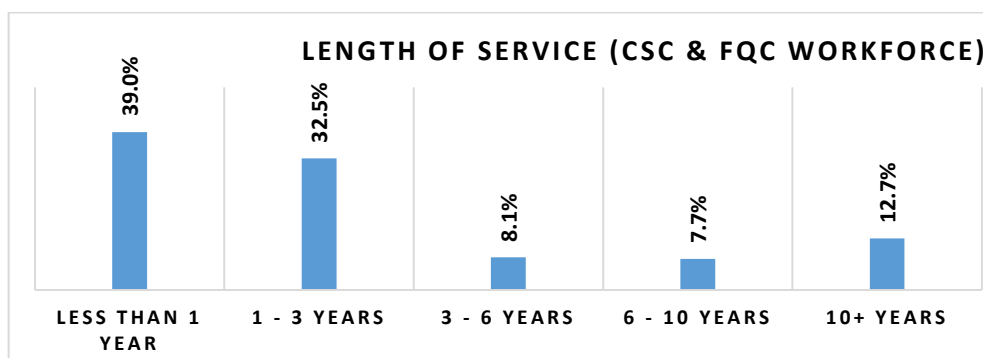
By the end of 2022 approximately half of practice was considered to be good. Audits carried out this year looking at practice through 2023 now indicates between two thirds to three quarters of practice is good.



3 Workforce – Recruitment, Retention and Professional Development

Total number of staff across the workforce <i>Includes: Perm & agency</i>	SW qualified Managers	Qualified SW Practitioners:	Non SW qualified Practitioners:	TOTAL
CSC (Includes CWCN)	53	202	154	409
FQC	38	12	83	133
TOTAL : CSC & FQC	91	214	237	542

Turnover in last 12 months	Starters	Leavers	Turnover %
Qualified	55	33	15.7%
Unqualified	57	27	
Total	112	60	



- 3.1 The pandemic had a negative impact on the social care/work workforce nationally. Locally, this affected our ability to recruit and retain experienced qualified social workers throughout 2022. We have had a relentless focus on workforce stabilisation and through diversifying the workforce, introducing Family Practitioners, having an agency to permanent campaign and expanding our Academy to support a higher intake of NQSW's and students. As at September 2023 staffing is now more stable, with approximately 80% of the workforce permanent, a 10% improvement on this time last year, this enables us to maintain manageable caseloads for more good practice to be delivered.
- 3.2 The downside is the qualified social work workforce lacks experience, on account of our reliance on recruiting Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW). Just under a third of the social workers (28%), have more than 3 years post qualifying experience, placing additional pressure on the experienced staff and managers. To mitigate this, we have introduced additional management support and oversight.
- 3.3 We have good succession planning in place, having created a career pathway, we are seeing a number of internal appointments made to next level positions and anticipate experience levels to increase through 2024-25, but we need to continue to recruit more experienced social workers to Lewisham. To support this, in 2023

we launched a recruitment strategy with new marketing materials, but it is too soon to see what impact this investment will have.

[Careers in children's social care: Why choose Lewisham? - YouTube](#)

[Children's Social Care in Lewisham: Training and Development - YouTube](#)

- 3.4 The 2019 Ofsted ILACS inspection reported the “*professional development of social workers had not been a priority*”. We are very clear that investing in creating a stable, skilled workforce is essential to deliver good services. The Principal Social Worker and Workforce Development Team created in 2019 are leading on the Workforce Development Strategy, which is being successfully delivered and is having a clear impact on staffing and practice improvement.
- 3.5 In FQC, Family Thrive have also undergone a training programme, SoS training is also incorporated so that across services there is a consistent and aligned response when working with families. Emphasis has also been placed on improving the apprentice program within Family Thrive. Two new apprentices joined the service on 28th August 2023.
- 3.6 In the March 2023 CSC staff health check survey, less than 10% of the workforce gave negative feedback and less than 5% said they were very unlikely to stay in Lewisham. Staff reported positively about the training available and said they have confidence in the SoS practice framework, which we can now see as well embedded in CSC safeguarding practice. Other feedback includes:
- ✓ 87% feel respected and supported by peers and their managers.
 - ✓ 84% enjoy working with the colleagues and feel their teams are well led.
 - ✓ 83% say they are supported to practice creatively and autonomously.
 - ✓ 65% report their team feels stable (50% increase on 21/22)
 - ✓ 63% feel they have access to career progression (up from 45% in 21/22).
 - ✓ 73% think Lewisham CSC is an anti-racist/discriminatory service.
 - ✓ 70% feel their health and emotional wellbeing is attended to.
 - ✓ 75% believe their senior leaders provide and role model a clear vision for practice and are accessible and approachable.

4. Management Oversight, Supervision and Caseloads

- 4.1 In late 2021 the CSC supervision policy was refreshed to set higher standards. Audit and the CSC 2023 health check survey tells us most staff are receiving regular reflective individual supervision. Supervision is supplemented by the introduction of several ‘Thinking Spaces’ which a peer led critical analysis and planning sessions to support practitioners to think through work with families and seek expertise from other experienced staff. NQSW’s also have additional support from Consultant Social Workers through the Academy programme.
- 4.2 In addition to that provided by the frontline managers, practice is supported and scrutinised through various oversight panels, all of which are chaired by a member of the Senior Leadership Team. Panels are usually multi-disciplinary and through the regular and systematic monitoring these panels provide, we are improving practice consistency, making clear risk balanced decisions, reducing delay and have tighter financial management. Panels also provide a clear line of sight to practice for the senior leaders.

4.3 The covid legacy and associated workforce challenges continued to be felt in the first half of 2022 and average caseloads continued to be higher than in our guidance. As the workforce has stabilised, management oversight has been strengthened and practice quality has improved, through 2023 the pressures are gradually easing. The table shows average caseloads as at September 2023.

Team	Assessment	Safe Space exploitation)	Children w.Complex Needs	Family Support/ Safeguarding	Children in Care	Care Leavers
Average caseload	16 (CYP)	10 (Fam)	15 (CYP)	18 (CYP)	15 CYP)	25 (YP)

5. Targeted Early Help - The CYP and families we are working with.

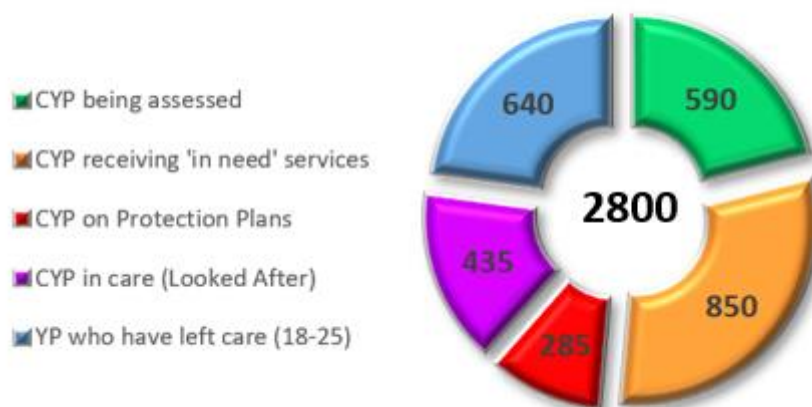
- 5.1 The Family Thrive service formed in January 2021 is still in its infancy, however, a key improvement has involved a review of the model of intervention, to offer families up to 26 weeks of support compared to a 12-week parenting intervention that the service was previously designed to offer. The aspiration is to strengthen parenting skills using SoS as the framework as well as evidence-based parenting programmes. As the lead professional, Family Practitioners work alongside families to provide targeted interventions with co-ordination from multi-agency networks to improve CYP outcomes. This work is strengthened by the input of Senior Therapists who provide systemic support to practitioners and direct intervention to families using a range of systemic approaches.
- 5.2 935 Family Thrive referrals were received in 2022/23, which in comparison to the previous year (2021/22) shows a decrease of 26%. The reduction in referrals during the reporting period can be attributed to the previous spike in referrals received post pandemic, which have now stabilised. In addition to the pre-intervention work now being undertaken by schools & across the partnership. The three primary presenting issues resulting in referral to Family Thrive include: Challenging Behaviour, Mental Health and Physical Chastisement. Schools, Health Services and Police are the primary referral sources. During the period, April – September 2023, 570 Family Thrive referrals were received with 374 Early Help Assessments (EHA's) completed during the same period. Initial analysis of referrals received during the same period in 2022/23 indicate a marginal reduction in referral numbers which is attributed to continued "team around" approaches and increased partnership working with MASH in regard to levels of need and thresholds.
- 5.3 632 CYP were closed to Family Thrive in 2022/23, with 40% meeting 1 or 2 supporting families (SF) outcomes and a further 17% achieving 3+. In 2022/23, a total of 36 CYP were stepped up to CSC, a reduction of 37% from the previous year and highlights a downward trend in escalation over the first to last quarter. During April – September 2023, 433 CYP were closed to the Family Thrive Service.
- 5.4 Additional senior practitioner capacity has been introduced for a greater degree of management oversight as well coaching and practice direction. This is supporting workforce stabilisation and a creating the platform to build a greater

degree of consistency across practice in the service. In August 2023, additional family practitioner and hub manager capacity was agreed to support case-load management activity and stabilise workforce levels to drive forward improvement work at all levels. An interim hub manager commenced in September 2023. Plans to temporarily appoint 2 x family practitioners are underway however, have been impacted by recruitment challenges experienced nationally, impacting the calibre of candidates. Work has also taken place to improve the management of data available to better manage practice. Improvements to the reporting mechanism has meant that the service is starting to access performance data. Calculations and methodology are more reliable than previous measures used and are providing assurance in the approach to move away from manual entry. Due to ongoing data management changes, several reports are still in development. Since July 2023, fortnightly performance meetings have been introduced to increase HoS and Director oversight.

- 5.5 In the Supported Families Programme, improvement work has included allocating an Early Help Co-ordinator to support capacity building for Team Around School and Team Around Family meetings, which is positively received by schools. The Supported Families initiative has taken on increased importance following the new framework (increased to a list of 10 outcomes) which came into effect from October 2022. In May/June 2023, 41 staff attended a training programme delivered on the New Supported Families framework. The number of primary outcomes achieved at the point of closure since the new framework was implemented also continues on an upwards trajectory.
- 5.6 The Ofsted JTAI identified; *“targeted support in the newly reconfigured multiagency early help ‘Family Thrive’ service means that multidisciplinary early help is starting to be prioritised for the most vulnerable families. Action by local authority leaders to reintegrate early help into children’s services is helping to accelerate the requisite multi-agency improvements.”*

6. Children’s Social Care – The CYP and families we are working with

September 2023



6.1 There was an 8% increase in contacts received in the MASH in 2022/23 but a slight reduction in those that become referrals onto CSC for a statutory assessment. Demand at the front door is approximately a third higher than pre-covid levels and as March CSC was supporting approximately 2900 CYP at any one time, 100 more than we were in the previous year. We believe this was the legacy of the surge in demand we experienced in 2021/22, however this has since fallen and is back down again and demand is levelling out, albeit at the higher rate.

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Q1-2 23/24
Contacts Received	15360	19141	18727	20322	9511
Referrals to CSC	3874	3153	4365	4052	2146
S47 Enquiries started	966	1036	1436	1410	396
CYP placed on CPP	326	336	458	313	118
Court applications (families)	55	68	52	63	22
CYP entering care	218	179	218	148	85
Net no. CYP in care	473	482	480	445	439
Net no. Care Leavers (18-25)	550*	582	641	660	619

*2019/20 Care Leaver figure unconfirmed as accurate data was unavailable

6.2 Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

Key partners are well represented in the operational MASH and strategic MASH Board. MASH has consistently sustained good performance, above the target of 90% on timeliness of decisions over the last 4 years. Daily MASH information sharing meetings are well established and audits routinely judge the quality of the decision making in MASH to be good. A dedicated full time Early Help co-ordinator in MASH now better supports family signposting to prevention services. The next step is to transition the MASH into a Single Point of Contact for a wider spectrum of CYP services in 2024. The November Ofsted JTAI noted: *“Diligent and collaborative work undertaken by co-located MASH professionals is highly valued across the LSCP and leads to effective and timely information-sharing and child-centred decisions. Prompt and extensive checks and historical information inform analysis of harm and current risk to vulnerable children and their families”*.

6.3 Out of hours service (EDT)

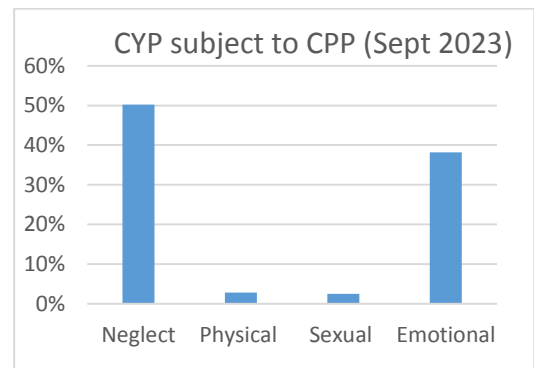
This service operates for CSC and Adults services, EDT staffing has been expanded in early 2023, two social workers are now on duty at peak times, to respond in a more timely way to CYP and families. The Bromley Road site is also now available as a place for CYP to be seen and kept safe in a comfortable environment, as an alternative to police stations in emergency situations.

6.4 Assessments of CYP and Child Protection Enquiries

Referrals to CSC are allocated to a qualified social worker within 1 day, we aim to see CYP within 10 working days and complete our assessment within 45 days. Staff shortages through 2022 impacted on performance to different degrees and to get more consistency, additional oversight and team specific plans were introduced in late 2022. As at Q2 (2022/23), 86% of assessments across the services are now completed within 45 days, just above our target of 85%. There have been slight improvements in the initial visit (62% in Q2), but there is still more to do to for our initial response to be more consistently prompt. Over 85% of CYP are seen within 20 days.

6.5

Through the first half of 2022 we continued to have a high rate of Child Protection Enquiries (*Section 47. Children Act 1989*) and growing numbers of CYP subject to Child Protection Plans (CPP). The main causes of CYP being subject to CPP relates to neglect and emotional abuse, often an aspect of domestic abuse.



6.6 We scrutinised practice to ensure it was CYP centred and risk was being managed in a balanced way. After recalibrating our approach in the second half of 2022 and stabilising staffing, the number of CYP being made subject of Section 47 enquiries was carefully and gradually managed down from 382 in April 2022 to 283 in September 2023, which is where we would expect Lewisham to be compared with other London Boroughs. The November 2022 Ofsted JTAI noted *“Proportionate action is taken to safeguard and prevent harm escalating for most children”*.

6.7 Private Fostering (PF)

In 2022/23 Lewisham received 26 notifications of possible PF arrangements, a slight increase from the last two years. Between April – Sept 2023 a further 4 PF carers have been confirmed and 8 have ended. Benchmarking suggests Lewisham’s have high numbers of CYP in PF arrangements, we believe this is due to good transport links for schools who have many international students, a large number of notifications are from education services. There is also a number of adolescents whose relationship with their parent(s) has broken down. Notifications are assessed in a timely way and the majority of visits are undertaken in statutory timescales, recognising many international students return to family during holidays. The PF of unaccompanied minors through the Homes for Ukraine

scheme is a new feature of work, we are working with the Refugee Resettlement Programme on ensuring the safety and care of those CYP. Next steps are an awareness raising campaign scheduled for 2024.

6.8 Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

The LADO role is responsible for managing allegations against adults who work with CYP. Contacts have fluctuated over the past 2-3 years due to the pandemic. Similar to last year, contacts remained higher than in the 2 years prior. Progress has been made to strengthen work with Early Years and Education. A peer review undertaken by Islington (August 2022) concluded that 'Overall, despite the challenges, allegations against staff and volunteers who work with CYP are taken seriously and responded to well'. The next steps are to continue making the identified improvements and respond to the learning from the peer review.

6.9 Children in need, subject to child protection plans (CPP) and care proceedings

The Family Support and Safeguarding Service (FSS) works with medium/long term CYP 'in need' (CIN) and/or on CPP and those subject to care proceedings. After a very challenging 18 months through 2021 and early 2022 where workforce instability and high caseloads were felt most acutely in this part of the service. In the second half of 2022/23 with more workforce stability, good progress is being made. As of September 2023, 95% of CIN are visited at minimum, once a month by their allocated social worker. For CPP, 77% of CYP on CPP were visited once a fortnight. Those not seen in timescale amounted to 49 CYP, we have reviewed all of these cases for the reasons. There are a range of issues; the main one being that the visit was attempted but for several reasons the CYP was not seen e.g. illness or the family is resisting contact. In all circumstances there was subjected management oversight and arrangements made to re-visit. Other reasons relate to recording issues, i.e. recorded late, or the way the visit is recorded did not get picked up in the data, these CYP had been visited. Only in a small number of cases were the CYP not seen in time for reasons to do with practice, which have been raised with the social workers.

6.10 The introduction of Family Practitioners in 2022, to safeguarding teams has been an especially positive development. A review of the impact found the diversification of the workforce brings a broader range of skills and depth of experience, there is good relational practice with helping more CYP to step down from requiring statutory services. Another notable achievement has been the expansion of the services delivered by our Meliot Family Support Service. Through 2021/22 we transitioned from commissioning and spot purchasing expert assessments, individual and group family support and supervised contact, to diversify our in-house service. The Meliot Family Support Service now provides a wide spectrum of intensive, tailored services targeted at the most vulnerable children.

6.11 Lewisham continues to be proactively involved in the South London Care Proceedings Project, meeting routinely with CAFCASS and local Judiciary to share best practice. In response to the Family Court President Public Law Working Group report, our protocols were revised and the legal pathway developed on LCS. Practice has also been strengthened for CYP in pre-proceedings and those in care by voluntary agreement (*Section 20 Children Act 1989*). However, due to

significant delays in the family courts the length of proceedings far exceeds the target of 26 weeks. In Q2 2023/24 the average was 50 weeks, but an improvement of an average of 61 weeks in 2022/23.

6.12 The cumulative impact of all the improvement work in safeguarding services, introducing Family Practitioners, the Meliot expansion and developing more critically reflective practice. There has been an overall net reduction of CYP on CPP, more are being regularly seen. More than half of CYP are being successfully diverted from care proceedings. Whilst there continue to be considerable delays in court timetabling, we have reduced the overall number of CYP in care proceedings (125 CYP / 77 families at EOY March 2023 compared to 140 CYP / 82 families at EOY March 2022) and we have fewer CYP entering and in care. Next steps is to improve consistent timeliness of CIN Reviews and Core Group Meetings and to continue improving the quality of our CYP plans setting out what impactful work needs to be done and by when.

6.13 **Supporting CYP with Special Education (SEND) & Complex Needs/Disabilities**

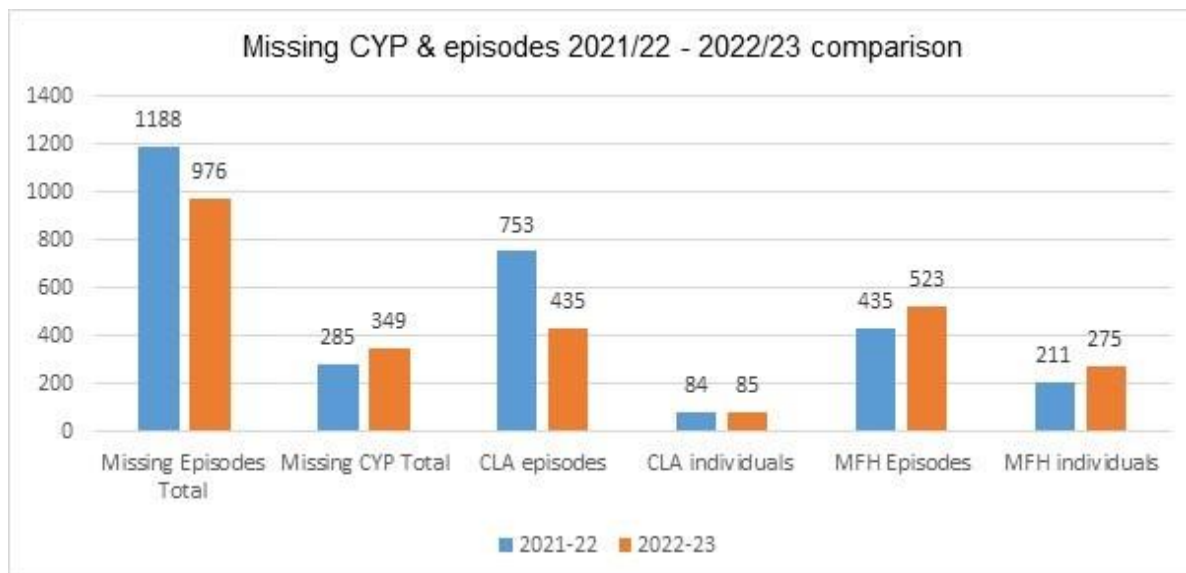
The Children with Complex Needs (CWCN) Service is part of the Integrated SEND Service and is co-located with Health. The wider SEND Service advises and supports families across a spectrum of need. The CWCN service supports 0-18-year-olds who are CIN, with an EHCP who meet eligibility criteria for a specialist service, including CYP subject to CPP and who are in care.

6.14 The CWCN Service has introduced an outcomes framework to better assess and measure the impact of services on CYP outcomes. The multi-agency weekly Care Package Panel makes decisions on new support services and has oversight of on-going care packages against the outcomes framework. The panel enables CYP to be stepped up or down to the right services, it also allows adjustments to care packages to meet changing needs while allowing provision of services to continue as required. The panel reviews services and preparation for adulthood for YP aged 14 plus. Depending on levels of complexity, CYP are referred into Lewisham Adult Social Care after reaching 17, to plan continuity of post 18 support. The quarterly Continuing Health Care Panel reviews YP turning 18. If threshold for Adult Services is met, decisions are made on next steps and services to be provided.

6.15 **CYP who are missing and experiencing exploitation**

The Lewisham partnership is proud of the work undertaken over the last two years to better identify and respond to CYP who go missing and extra-familial risk. There is clear evidence of an improvement journey with consistent multi-agency attendance and participation from key partners and lead professionals at missing and MACE (Multi-Agency Child Exploitation) meetings, which is starting to improve outcomes for CYP. After strengthening our processes for CYP who go missing and increasing capacity in our missing team during 2021/22. Return Home Interviews (RHI's) are now offered for 97% of all episodes. For the remaining 3%, this was due to the CYP being in custody, hospital or having gone missing again. Take up of RHI's is 53% and there are various reasons why e.g. CYP do not want to engage, parents decline or the CYP goes missing again.

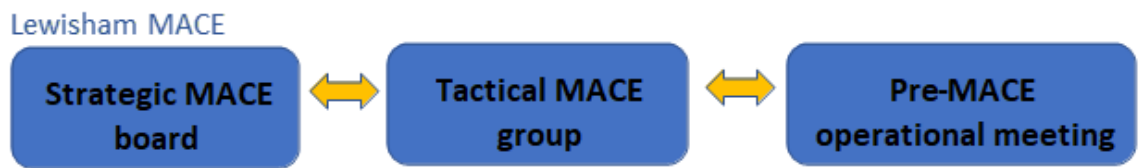
6.16 Multi-agency strategy meetings are routinely held if a CYP remains missing for more than 48 hours (or sooner if high risk), to plan how the professional network will locate the CYP and facilitate their safe return. RHI's then inform the safety plan for the CYP and intelligence on locations, high risk individuals/activities and trends from RHI's are reported into the MACE, to organise strategic interventions.



6.17 Whilst the number of CYP in care reported missing is similar to last year, there has been a 40% reduction in the number of episodes. Whereas we have seen a 20% increase in episodes of CYP reported missing from home. However, on examination this does not reflect a significant increase in missing related risk. Just over two thirds of CYP who went missing from home (No.191 of 275) only had one episode and the biggest single increase is episodes of CYP missing for under 24 hours. Including 120 episodes for CYP who have no involvement with CSC.

In Q2 there was 264 missing episodes in total (consisting of 113 missing from home and 151 CLA). This is an increase from Q1 in which there were 239 missing episodes (consisting of 107 missing from home and 132 CLA). The increase in missing episodes in Q2 occurred around the start of summer holidays. This is also reflected in the number of children going missing from home with a decrease in August, which could be due to be CYP being away with their families. It is noted that the top 5 CYP with the most episodes for July through to September are made up of 4 Children Looked After (CLA) who are females. The one child missing from home is male, aged 13. The top 4 CLA make up 50 missing episodes. The 1 child missing from home made up 11 episodes for this quarter.

We are seeing a significant increase of females going missing in Q2, as well as CYP's who are aged 13 years old. We are aware that we have several cohorts of CYP's who are going missing together on a regular basis whose age range is 12 – 13 years. They are a mixture of CLA and CYP's missing from home. Intel gathered through mapping identified addresses that some of these CYP's were staying at and as a result a Child Abduction Warning Notices (CAWN), was issued to an adult. The adult was also escalated as adult of concern to MACE.



[Lewisham Safeguarding Children Partnership: \(safeguardinglewisham.org.uk\)](https://safeguardinglewisham.org.uk)

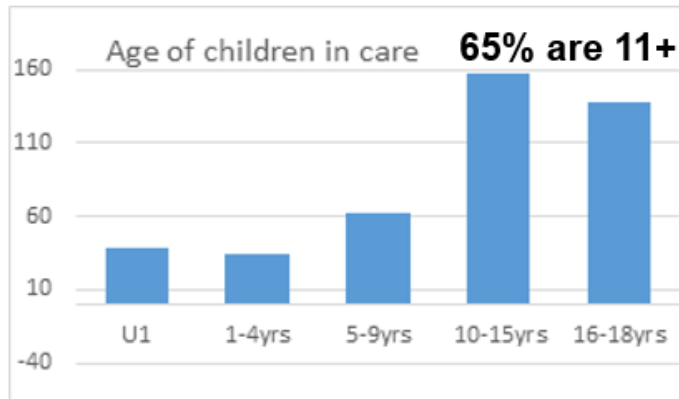
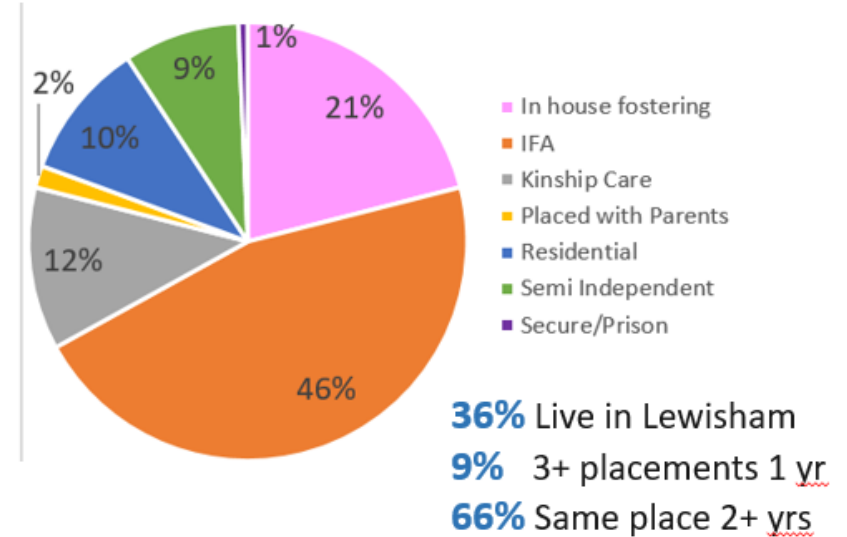
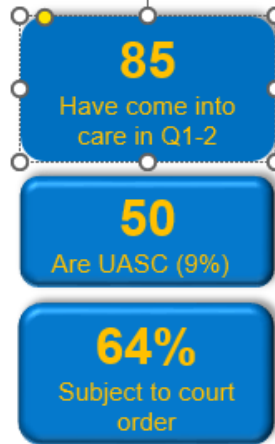
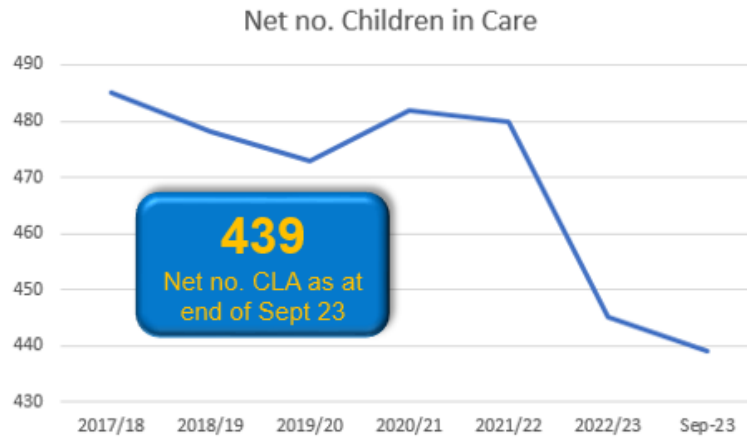
- 6.18 In February 2022, Lewisham replaced the Concern Hub with a MACE model, based on Pan London guidance. The MACE leads and monitors practice for extra-familial harm/exploitation and serious youth violence of CYP up to 25 more effectively than the previous arrangements. In 2022/23 the MACE received 93 notifications. 63% of YP referred had risk reduced through effective interventions. MACE has also progressed several tactical actions in response to emerging themes, incidents and locations of concern. This includes work led by the Police and Safer Communities, to disrupt access to alcohol, working with gambling establishments, supporting specific schools and community work. The Police BCU have integrated several resources into a dedicated Child Exploitation Unit, increasing capacity and improving partnership working.
- 6.19 Lewisham's exploitation strategy is being updated in 2023. The four principles of - Prevent, Protect, Restore and Pursue will set out how the multi-agency partnership works together to reduce exploitation and help young people feel safer. The strategy will also draw on the work of the new adolescent service and progress of the tactical MACE following embedding the pan London procedures in 2022. The strategy and associated plan will be overseen by the LSCP Strategic MACE board.
- 6.20 **Trafficking and modern slavery**
- In March 2023 Lewisham CSC launched its first National Referral Mechanism (NRM) panel after a successful Home Office bid. To date 42 CYP have been heard at the NRM panel, qualifying them for a service from Barnardo's Independent Child Trafficking Guardian Service. Lewisham receives a higher number of referrals than neighbouring boroughs and we have made conclusive grounds decisions within 45 days on majority of CYP. Compared to some centralised Home Office NRM decisions taking over a year. In the pilot we are achieving timely outcomes for the CYP, in particular for those who have entered the criminal justice system, as a positive NRM decision influences how offences are dealt with by the courts.
- 6.21 Safe Space is CSC's specialist adolescent social work service. Since its inception in 2020, the team has continued to establish its expertise, providing effective interventions to young people at risk of extra familial harm and homeless 16/17-year-olds. Since August 2022 a fortnightly Contextual Safeguarding Thinking Space (CTS) now also provides wider access to their expertise, when young people are allocated in other services but are affected by exploitation. Audits judge the majority of practice in Safe Space is good and their positive work was recognised in the JTAI (November 2022).

6.22 **An integrated Adolescent/Youth Service**

In 2022, CYPS created a senior lead officer for Adolescent Safeguarding and in 2023 we planned the creation of an integrated adolescent service, incorporating Safe Space, Youth Justice and a range of youth services. The service become operational in July 2023. An Adolescent Board will oversee the development, strengthening preventative work and widening therapeutic input to support a better understanding of the emerging needs and vulnerabilities of CYP such as emotional mental health needs and neurodiversity.

7. Corporate Parenting: Our children in care and care experienced young people (Care Leavers)

7.1 Headline information (Data as at September 2023)

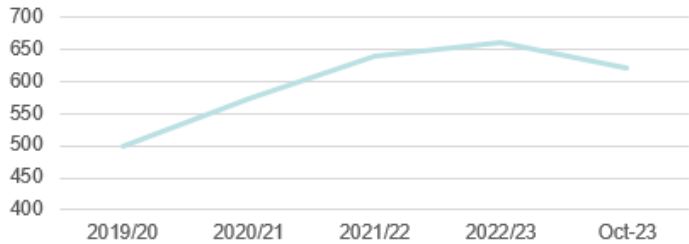


54% Male
46% Female
A small number of our children describe their gender differently

Ethnicity

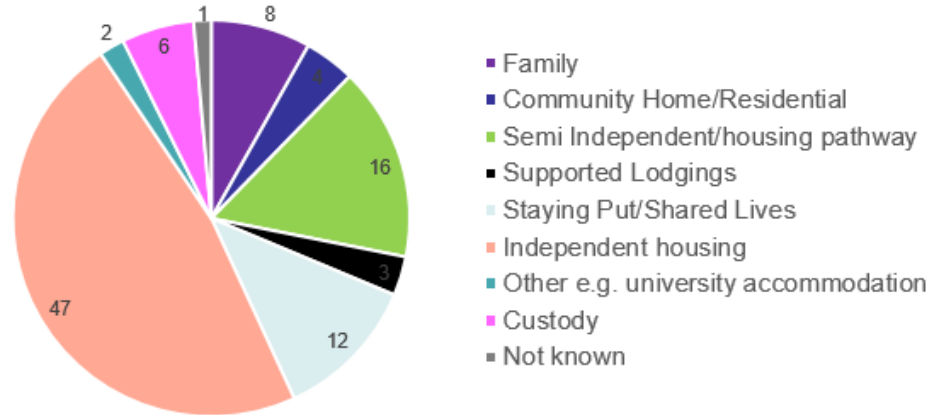
	LA Latest snapshot		
	CLA	Pop	% difference
White	28	37	lower -26%
Mixed	28	18	higher 58%
Asian	5	6	lower -14%
Black	31	34	lower -9%
Other	7	4	higher 77%

Net no. Care Leavers

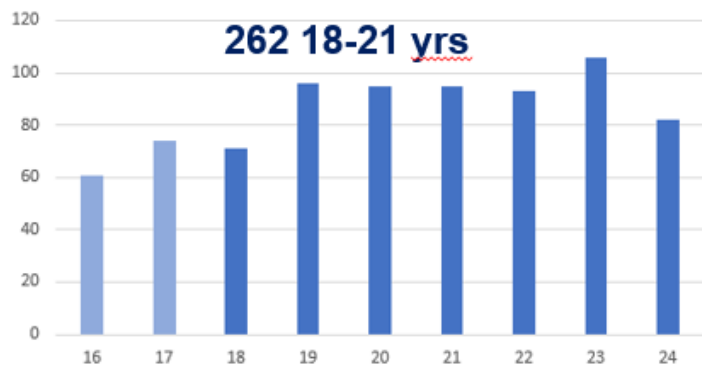


616
Total (18-25)

110
Are UASCL



Age of our care leavers



62% Male

38% Female

A small number of our children describe their gender differently


Ethnicity

22	White
13	Mixed
7	Asian
45	Black
12	Other

58%
In Education, Training or Employment


7.2 Lewisham Corporate Parenting Strategy (2021-2024)

We are in the third year of delivering our Corporate Parenting Strategy. This set out 6 ambitions and 24 aims for how we intend to make sure our CYP have a positive care experience and we make a bigger difference in their lives, both now and in the future. The strategic action plan is delivered through a range of multi professional groups and progress is monitored by the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB), chaired by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services. The tables on the following pages report the progress made on this strategy and the impact it has had, against the ambitions.

7.3 Ambitions	What we want for our CYP	Progress on the actions through 2022/23	What difference this has made
	<p>Understanding Corporate Parenting</p>	<p>In 2022 council wide leadership officer Corporate Parenting sessions were delivered. For all newly elected members, Corporate Parenting is part of induction. In October 2023 a dedicated Mayor & Cabinet session was held on Corporate Parenting to begin formulating a refreshed strategy for 2024.</p> <p>CPB membership has widened in 2023 to include Adults Services and Foster Carer representatives.</p>	<p>There is a wider understanding of Corporate Parenting across the council and with elected members, creating new opportunities e.g. More jointly funded complex care placements with health. The provision of a broader range of housing and free leisure offer for care leavers. In June 2022 Mark Riddell, Care Leaver advisor to the DfE visited Lewisham and fed back: <i>“The CPB has a really good buy-in from elected members and I was able to see a developing Partnership Offer.”</i></p>
	<p>Promoting inclusivity and diversity</p>	<p>The anti-racist network group developed a statement of intent and action plan to promote anti-racist practice.</p> <p>CYP has expanded its missing team with a dedicated missing officer assigned to CYP in care & care leavers.</p> <p>We have strengthened the out of borough notification processes, so CYP placed outside Lewisham are not further disadvantaged by their distance from home.</p>	<p>CPB increasingly influences services for our care population. e.g. Continued funding for the dedicated Care Leaver nurse (pilot) was as a direct result of the CPB’s recommendation.</p> <p>Signs of Connection & Belonging has shown good early indications of improved placement planning and stability for CYP who are more difficult to place.</p>
	<p>Living in a safe and caring community</p>	<p>In 2023 CSC has extended and adapted our Signs of Safety practice framework into the Corporate Parenting, developing a ‘signs of belonging and connection’ approach and building in weekly case mapping to support more good care, permanence and placement planning.</p>	<p>Our anti-racist approach and trauma informed practice in the Youth Offending Service (YOS) has impacted on how we work with black CYP and proactively challenges disproportionality and adultification, to deliver more culturally sensitive services. We see positive reductions in first time entrants, re-offending and remands to custody.</p>
	<p>Improving our care and pathway planning</p>	<p>The IRO service is strengthening its footprint through monthly operational and quarterly strategic panels held with the SLT, trends, themes, issues and learning from reviews is shared to improve practice and address escalations more promptly.</p>	<p>UASC are supported with their immigration status. Merton compliant age assessments are completed in a timely manner and where there is concern about modern-day slavery an NRM referral is made. QA audits consistently judges the quality of practice with UASC as good.</p> <p>There are 40% fewer episodes of CYP in care going missing compared to last year.</p>

7.4 Ambitions	What we want for our CYP	Progress on the actions through 2022/23	What difference this has made												
<div style="background-color: #0056b3; color: white; padding: 10px; text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;">THIS IS MY HOME</div>	<p>Knowing where I will grow up</p>	<p>The Sufficiency Strategy 2022-25 was developed and implementation is underway for all 8 key aims</p> <p>SG/family & friends team was expanded to ensure timely assessments a stronger offer of support. Policies, processes, allowances, support and training offer for all Family & Friends care are being refreshed.</p>	<p>We have more CYP in family based arrangements:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>2020/21</th> <th>2022/23</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>F&F Reg 24/25 arrangements</td> <td>34</td> <td>43</td> </tr> <tr> <td>SGO arrangements</td> <td>244</td> <td>274</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Formal matches to LT foster carers</td> <td>4</td> <td>13</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		2020/21	2022/23	F&F Reg 24/25 arrangements	34	43	SGO arrangements	244	274	Formal matches to LT foster carers	4	13
		2020/21	2022/23												
	F&F Reg 24/25 arrangements	34	43												
	SGO arrangements	244	274												
Formal matches to LT foster carers	4	13													
<p>Receiving good quality care</p>	<p>The placement team has been expanded with a wider remit to strengthen QA of placements and we join the Commissioning Alliance in June 2023.</p> <p>The fostering hub was launched in June 2023, for carers to access support, training and advice. A DfE innovation grant was awarded in July 2023 to develop a Foster Carer led recruitment hub.</p>	<p>80% of CYP live in a family/foster placement, above England & SN. 10% live in residential care (compared to 12% in 2020/21) However we have not seen more CYP living with in-house Lewisham foster carers, even though we recruited 9 new households. This is priority for 2024</p> <p>Provider forums and changes to the placement service are showing positive signs of offering some placement for CYP who are more challenging to place.</p>													
<p>Staying in the same place</p>	<p>Placements, fostering and SG/F&F teams now provide a three way duty system for social workers.</p> <p>Placement provider forums and CYP specific events have been introduced with placement providers.</p>	<p>More than half of CYP are placed outside Lewisham, (similar to SN), but 2% less than last year are more than 20+ miles from home.</p>													
<p>Feeling safe and secure in my home</p>	<p>The housing pathway for care leavers has 60 more semi-independent homes in Lewisham to support transition YP's towards independent housing nomination. With a dedicated housing officer matching YP to suitable housing & support. We have also developed creative packages of support with IFA's to enable more YP to remain 'Staying Put'</p> <p>Through 2022 multi-agency oversight panels for CYP in care have established. Chaired by SLT, they provide scrutiny, accountability, shared decision making and tracking to minimise drift & delay</p>	<p>66% of CYP under 16 in care for 2+ years or more, have been in the same placement for at least 2 years. This shows permanency tracking panel is influencing permanent outcomes.</p> <p>We have more care leavers in Staying Put arrangements, offering continuity of care and life long connections.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>20/21</th> <th>21/22</th> <th>22/23</th> <th>Sep.23</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td>53</td> <td>34</td> <td>52</td> <td>72</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		20/21	21/22	22/23	Sep.23		53	34	52	72			
	20/21	21/22	22/23	Sep.23											
	53	34	52	72											

7.5 Ambitions	What we want for our CYP	Progress on the actions through 2022/23	What difference this has made
<div style="background-color: #2e8b57; color: white; padding: 10px; text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;">HEALTHILY AND WELL</div>	<p>Being fit and well</p>	<p>The CSC/health steering group have; improved data sharing, are in discussion with prisons & secure units to improve practice so health needs are addressed. Care leavers now have free prescriptions and the dedicated nurse for care leavers piloted in early 2022 has had funding extended to establish the post.</p>	<p>A significant improvement has been made with health partners receiving notifications for CYP placed out of borough, to link into services in the host Authority.</p>
	<p>Feeling happy and hopeful</p>	<p>Since April 2022 the Insight Service has offered substance/alcohol misuse and sexual health support.</p>	<p>The Sexual Health Service has been well used by CYP in care, signposting CYP for additional support. Male nurses are available for UASC. CYP in care and Care Leavers who are pregnant are cared for by the Teenage Midwife team with plans for the postnatal period.</p>
	<p>Having hobbies and interests</p>	<p>The CAMHS Orbit team in Virtual School supports CYP in care, SG and adopted with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs to access support participate in education.</p> <p>The CWCN team and the Adults transition team have been improving practice & pathways into adult services. In 2022 a transitions panel was introduced to improve pathway planning for 16/17 year olds transitioning to adulthood and to better link them into adult services.</p>	<p>The dedicated nurse for care leavers has enabled YP to gain quicker access to health services. 85% of care leavers are registered with a GP. UASC are supported with HO requests for health information and referrals to specialist support. UASC are routinely referred to University College Hospital London to screen their health.</p>
	<p>Keeping connected to people that matter</p>	<p>Foster carers, CYP in care and care leavers have free gym membership to 'Lewisham Be Active Leisure'.</p>	<p>In June 2022 Mark Riddell, Care Leaver advisor to the DfE fed back: <i>"The health offer was good in that there is a nurse placed within leaving care which is exceptional practice"</i></p>
		<p>Life story work using the Signs of Connection & Belonging approach has been a focus in 2023, to help all CYP understand their care journey.</p>	<p>As at Q4 2022/23, 27 CYP were being supported by Action for Children with Independent Visitors. Performance has been consistently good, with good feedback. There has been good stability in the matches, average length is 1.5 years</p>
		<p>A dedicated 'family time' contact team is now in place at Meliot Family Centre, to manage the most suitable arrangements for CYP in care. Lewisham commission Independent Visiting from Action for Children. In 2022 the contract was extended to increase from 20 to 30 matches.</p>	

7.6 Ambitions	What we want for our CYP	Progress on the actions through 2022/23	What difference this has made
HAVING A VOICE	Making a difference	Unfortunately, after losing the lead Participation Officer for our Child in Care Council (CICC) in 2022, we were unable to recruit a replacement until April 2023. As a consequence, much CICC activity had to be paused through 2022. However, the new Participation lead is now rapidly re-establishing the CICC groups and has a comprehensive work programme in place linked to this strategy.	CICC/Elevation participants have been involved in shaping the development of the Corporate Parenting Strategy, the Child Exploitation Strategy, the Placement Sufficiency Strategy, the development of the Housing Pathway for Care Leavers and more recently in commissioning services for Advocacy and Independent Visitors.
	Listening to my experience	CiCC members have continued to participate in our Listening and Learning bi-annual QA events, consulting with CYP to ascertain their experience about the care they have received. Members of Elevation also continue to be engaged in recruitment and training of social workers.	Elevation (Care Leavers CICC Group) delivered cultural competency training to practitioners as part of October Black History Month. 92% of CYP participate in their statutory review meeting and IRO's work creatively to encourage CYP's meaningful engagement in the process, to ensure their voices influence their care plans.
	Making plans and decisions 'with' you	 <p>The Young Mayors Team has moved to the CYP Directorate and plans to integrate the CICC Participation Officer into this team to widen their reach and improve resilience are in progress for 2024.</p>	<p>NYAS are currently commissioned to deliver Lewisham's advocacy service. 2022/23 No.of Hours delivered and CYP Supported:</p> <p>Q1: 286 hours, 55 young people Q2: 285 hours, 27 young people Q3: 268 hours, 50 young people Q4: 283 hours, 62 young people</p>
	Helping to grow good social work	The Participation Strategy is currently being refreshed and will be published in late 2023.	<p>2023/24 Q1: 264 hours, 49 young people Q2: 287 hours, 45 young people</p> <p>There are more CYP self referring and NYAS have supported a number of CYP to address issues such as care decisions, placements and access to savings.</p>

7.7 Ambitions	What we want for our CYP	Progress on the actions through 2022/23	What difference this has made
ASPIRATIONS & AMBITIONS	Reaching my potential	A protocol between Virtual School (LVS) & CSC supports good transition between different phases e.g. entry into care, transition into post 16 and for post 16 PEPs to ensure CYP have a learner profile for transfer to post 18 services. The PEP will now be used by services such as Jobs & Skills to plan for employability. LVS has also commissioned the Education Business Partnership for all CYP to have an employability plan.	95% of CYP in care who are school students have a PEP completed annually, for the autumn term 86% of CYP had a PEP updated. Available data suggests the outcomes at KS2 & KS4 are consistently above national indicators. The no. of CYP entering university this year is expected to increase by 4%. 13 have completed UCAS applications, this represents the highest number expected to enter HE. This year our CLA had the best GCSE results ever yet, in Lewisham.
	Being the best version of myself	PEP's are done termly (not annually). Changes have been made to recording and performance oversight tightened. Enrichment activities are identified via the PEP process, integrated into the overall plan. We have supported a number of CYP to pursue their talents e.g. providing music classes, sports coaching, time in a recording studio.	The additional capacity in LVS means we can better secure appropriate education for CYP with an EHCP and SEND. This is particularly important for CYP placed outside of Lewisham.
	Getting involved and having fun	LVS have improved attendance tracking, absence data is rigorously scrutinised so no CYP are unofficially excluded. LVS is also working with the Young Lewisham Project and has developed an exclusion reduction programme which is being offered to all Lewisham Schools.	There has been an increase in secondary school attendance = 91% compared with 85% last year. There has been a decrease in fixed term exclusions compared with last year – 3 (13) CYP excluded, 5 (30) days lost to exclusions. There have been no permanent exclusions and unauthorized absences have fallen to below 5%. Persistent absence has fallen by over 30% and no Lewisham CYP in care is currently missing education. Lewisham's approach was identified as a best practice model in the recent Children's Commissioners report.
	Skills for work	<p>The Orbit service in LVS has been expanded. Two more specialist psychologists ensure all CYP have timely access to an EP service. A SEND officer is now in post to ensure CYP have prompt access to support. These roles have a particular focus CYP placed outside Lewisham.</p> <p>LVS are working with the Attachment Research Community (ARC) towards all Lewisham Schools being attachment and trauma aware by 2025.</p> <p>'Lewisham Works' is developing a bespoke programme to support Care Leavers into EET. To go live in Jan.2024.</p>	Lewisham Works are currently working with 31 Care Leavers of which 20 have been supported into training or work. 58% of Care Leavers are in EET which is comparable to other London Boroughs but not as high as we aspire to achieve.

7.8 Ambitions	What we want for our CYP	What we said we would do	Progress on the actions through 2021-23
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">BECOMING INDEPENDENT</p>	<p>Managing my money</p>	<p>Bromley Road became operational in July 2022, the Care Leaver & UASC team is now based there and the location is being developed as a one stop shop. Group activities to support YP are routinely held there, e.g. cooking and using the setting up home grant. DWP and Lewisham Works provide sessions for advice on finding employment, writing CV's, apprenticeships and benefits.</p>	<p>In June 2022, Mark Riddell, Care Leaver advisor to the DfE fed back PA caseloads were too high. We increased the establishment and recruited, caseloads have reduced from average 35 to 25, providing more capacity to co-allocate a PA to YP at 17, to start pathway planning at an earlier stage.</p>
	<p>Ready to look after myself</p>	<p>Through 2021/22 the processes for managing savings were reviewed and re-organised. To ensure all CYP received the correct amount in their trust funds.</p> <p>The Care Leavers Service staffing establishment was increased by x3 to enable more YP to be allocated a Personal Advisor and reduce caseloads</p>	<p>We are regularly 'in touch' with 85% of our care leavers and 78% are regularly visited every 8 weeks by their PA. Bromley Road now provides a welcoming, accessible and supportive environment, where YP can get guidance in one place.</p> <p>Transitions panel is beginning to support smoother transitions and access into the right adult services. CSC Adults services and housing are working together to support more care leavers with complex needs.</p>
	<p>Knowing where to get advice and help</p>	<p>A Transitions Panel was introduced in December 2022. The panel has representatives from DWP, Lewisham Works, Housing, Health and Adults Services. The panel is to support a smooth transition into adult services, independence and the leaving care service, with co-allocation of a personal advisor from 17 years old, which we plan to reduce to 16 in 2023/24, once embedded.</p>	<p>There is a significant reduction in complaints received from Care Leavers relating to late or absence of payments of savings or entitlements.</p>
	<p>Having access to the right services</p>	<p>In February 2023 we commissioned and set up the Grandmentors programme for our Care Leavers. To link YP to a volunteer mentor to support their independence and development of community links. Volunteers are being recruited and trained and YP are being identified for matching to a Grandmentor.</p> <p>In August 2023 the Care Leaver Local Offer and Financial Entitlements Handbook were updated to reflect recent changes and additions.</p>	<p>93% of our YP are living in suitable accommodation and we now have a broad spectrum of semi-independent housing options to best support transitions. The housing pathway has resulted in less spot purchased provision (203 in 20/21 to 33 in 2022/23). This means we have more control over the quality of the support provided to our YP. We are confident when the YP are put forward for their priority nomination for housing, they are ready to manage independently and evictions have fallen. In June 2022 Mark Riddell fed back: <i>"Housing came across as a very strong offer with ringfenced housing units and clear pathways to support care leavers"</i></p>

7.9 Lewisham Placement Sufficiency Strategy (2022-2025)

One of the key ambitions in the Corporate Parenting Strategy is; [This is my home](#), a very intentional focus on the importance of finding the right placement and/or accommodation for care leavers at the right time, which can shape CYP care and post care experience. A refresh of our Placements Sufficiency Strategy in 2022 set out what we would do to deliver this ambition and respond to the national and local challenges. There is no one single approach that will address the complex placements landscape, much of which we have limited control and influence over. Success of delivering the strategy requires a multi layered approach, which we intend will have a cumulative impact. The Placement Sufficiency Strategy is monitored through the Sufficiency Board, chaired by the Executive Director of CYP Services and has eight key strategic aims, summarising the actions we are taking:



1. **Prevention:** Keep more children and young people safely at home with their families and avoid the need to come into or stay in care unnecessarily.
2. **Permanence Planning:** Early and timely permanence planning, so that children and young people only remain in care for as long as they need to and have the security of knowing where they will live and who will be looking after them.
3. **Family & Friends Care:** When children and young people cannot remain safely living at home. Support more of them to be able to live within their own extended network of family and friends.
4. **Foster Carers & Supported Lodgings:** Increase the pool and diversity of in-house local foster carers, so more children and young people in care can live in stable family-based alternatives, which help keep them connected to their important contacts and communities, including opportunities to Stay Put post 18 years are considered
5. **Placement planning & stability:** Improve placement matching, to provide CYP in care the best placement options to meet their needs, keep them safe, and provide them with stability and opportunities to reach their potential.
6. **Commissioned Placements:** Commission a broad range of regulated placements, which are of excellent quality and offer value for money to Lewisham.
7. **Care Leaver & UASC Accommodation:** Develop a continuum of suitable local supported and independent housing options for care leavers to meet a broad range of needs. Ensuring timely transitions and securing tenancies that offer long term stability.
8. **Systems & Data Development** efficient systems & processes to: (a) support best practice, (b) minimise bureaucracy, (c) provide reliable performance data and (d) support strong financial manage

7.10 Update on Phase 1, progress made in the first year of the strategy

Aim 1 – Prevention

Lewisham has a high net rate of CYP in care and Care Leavers arising from the legacy of historic practice, which we are now reducing. In summary the investment in prevention has involved the introduction of the Signs of Safety practice framework (Introduced in 2020), placing more emphasis on keeping families

together safely through risk sensible approaches to safeguarding. The creation of the Safe Space service to provide specialist support for adolescents at risk of exploitation. The expansion of the Meliot Family Support Service now offering targeted intensive support to the most vulnerable CYP, who are on CPP, in court proceedings and on the edge of coming into care. The number of CYP entering court proceedings, entering care and the net no. of CYP in care has been reducing, despite an increase in demand for services in the MASH post covid.

7.11 Family and Friends Care & Permanence Planning

Family and friends care (F&F) supports CYP to benefit from remaining in their own network and secure permanence at the earliest opportunity, if they are unable to return home. If placed with F&F from the outset of their care journey, they are more likely to experience fewer, if any placement moves and remain connected upon leaving care. Temporary F&F foster care placements are governed by the Care Planning and Placement Review Regulations 2002, with Regulation 24 and 25 providing the statutory framework to assess and approve family members as temporary foster carers, to care for Looked After CYP where there is a pre-existing relationship and they are assessed as suitable to fulfil this role.

7.12 Permanence planning refers to the long term plan for the CYP to remain in, or exit care. CYP need to know where they will live and who will be looking after them, to support their stability and security. We aim to have a permanence plan in place at the earliest opportunity and to ensure CYP are only in care for as long as they need to. Permanence options are: (a) Return home and leave care (b) Be permanently cared for by extended family or friends, who seek a Special Guardianship Order, or a Child Arrangement Order, therefore CYP leave care (c) Or Regulation 24 carers seek full approval as family and friends 'connected' foster carers (d) Long term fostering (or residential care) if none of the above options are viable, or (e) adoption.

7.13 In phase one we have:

- ✓ Updated procedures and processes to identify, assess and approve F&F carers.
- ✓ Tightened systems for timely allocation of all permanency assessments.
- ✓ Strengthened allowances, support and training for temporary approved carers.
- ✓ Increased oversight of all Regulation 24/25 and 25+ unregulated placements.
- ✓ Improved practice on early permanence planning through training and embedding Permanency Tracking Panel and Permanency Planning meetings.

7.14 The impact has been that we are now identifying F&F carers earlier, assessments of viable carers are more timely with better support plans to enable more CYP to live in F&F arrangements. We also have had an increase in Special Guardianship Orders granted for CLA 2023/24 (18 between Jan – Aug 2023), plus 4 for non-CLA. This has contributed to the reduction in care numbers.

7.15 Fostering and Supported Lodgings

In phase one we have:

- ✓ Launched Bromley Rd Fostering Hub, a dedicated space for foster carers.
- ✓ Completed the annual update of the Fostering Statement of Purpose.
- ✓ Provided a one off cost of living payment to Lewisham foster carers.

- ✓ Responding to ministerial guidance, we have increased fostering allowances.
- ✓ Updated procedures and processes and management oversight systems.
- ✓ Established fostering duty function and put in place and emergency foster carer system for out of hours.
- ✓ Re-joined the South London Fostering and Special Guardianship Consortium.
- ✓ Undertaken a review of Supported Lodgings.

7.16 We were unable to recruit to the vacant fostering marketing lead role, which delayed implementing our fostering recruitment strategy. A person was appointed in September 2023 and concerted work is now underway to rebrand and re-advertise. Despite this, we have continued to recruit reasonably well compared to other Boroughs, through 2022/23 9 new fostering households, offering 17 placements have been approved and 6 Supported Lodgings were approved, offering 6 placements for care leavers, aged 18 – 21 years. So far in Q1-2 of 2023/24, we have approved 3 new fostering households and we have 5 families currently in the assessment stages.

7.17 **Commissioned placements and placement planning/stability**

The significant national challenges in securing care placements for CYP in care is clearly documented and can be found in two significant recent national reports: The Competition and Markets Authority, CSC market study report (2022) and the Independent Review of CSC (2022).

7.18 Lewisham has a high reliance on commissioned placements to meet its sufficiency duty and will continue to need to buy in care placements going forward. The aim of this aspect of the strategy is to ensure we secure good quality and value placements matched to the needs of our CYP. It is also to gain more influence over a market of which we have little control on price. In phase one we have:

- ✓ Joined the Commissioning Alliance (regional framework).
- ✓ Re-aligned and expanded the Placements Team to create a centralised systems of placement management.
- ✓ Improved quality assurance processes for external care placements.
- ✓ Strengthened oversight of care placements for CYP with the most complex needs, e.g. those subject to a DOLs, in unregistered placements, secure accommodation, or youth custody.
- ✓ Introduce Signs of Connection and Belonging practice framework, to support better placement stability.
- ✓ Introduced Lewisham care provider forums to build better relationships.
- ✓ Introduced 'Finding a home for a Lewisham child' sessions with providers to find CYP with particularly complex needs a placement.
- ✓ Supported providers to seek fast track Ofsted registration where appropriate.
- ✓ Established a Shared Funding Panel with Education and Health (ICB) partners to agree shared funding for CYP in complex and high cost placements.
- ✓ Appointment of clinical lead in partnership with ICB, to support brokerage of complex placement and navigation of key health services.

7.19 This aspect of the strategy is especially challenging given the national landscape. The measures that have been put in place have helped us to maintain reasonably good placement stability, 8% of children experience 3+ placements compared to 9% at the end of 22/23 and 10% at the end of 21/22. We are identifying where

placement providers are falling short of delivering expected levels of care more quickly and having fostered some good relationships with local providers, enabling us to find or create bespoke placements for most of our most complex CYP.

- 7.20 However, any cost benefits these developments are delivering are entirely overshadowed by the spiralling cost of placements (see the table below). It is too soon to see whether joining to Commissioning Alliance will enable us to have more influence but are not yet seeing any discernible difference in cost. Overall, we have seen a 17% increase in CYP in the higher cost placements since February of 2023. The average and mode cost of placements has significantly increased, placing considerable pressure on the care budgets. The table below shows the difference from February 23 to August 23.

Placement cost bandings	FEB-23 No.CLA	% of care population	AUG-23 No.CLA	% of care population	Difference
>£500	147	9%	152	8%	1% decrease
£500-£2k	255	53%	250	39%	14% decrease
£2-4k	12	7%	11	5%	2% decrease
£4-7k	18	18%	28	22%	4% increase
£7-£15k	6	11%	17	19%	8% increase
£15k+	1	2%	4	7%	5% increase

7.21 Care leavers and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)

In Phase 1 we have:

- ✓ Embedded a care leaver transitions panel with adults services, to improve pathway planning into independence.
- ✓ Progressed the Northover and Amersham accommodation projects. Target open date early 2024, providing additional 8 beds for care leavers and 5 beds for 16/17 year old CYP in care with complex needs.
- ✓ Acquired more beds within the Lewisham housing pathway for care leavers.
- ✓ Improved procedures to fast track additional DFE funding for UASC.
- ✓ Developed sufficient in house trained foster care placements for more UASC.

- 7.22 This work has resulted in more care leavers ‘staying put’ with their foster carers (No.72), A broad spectrum of semi-independent care leaver accommodation is available, with early social housing nominations through the housing pathway and 93% of our care leavers are in suitable accommodation.

- 7.23 We are entering Phase 2 of the Placement Sufficiency Strategy and have identified priority actions going forward for each of the 8 aims. More details were provided in a report to the Corporate Parenting Board in October 2023.

8. Priorities for 2024

While significant improvements have been made across CYP Services and we have assessed we are now providing ‘good’ services to vulnerable CYP and families in Lewisham. We are not complacent and recognise there is still lots more to do, bringing all aspects of our systems and practice up to a consistently good standard. Ensuring we embed and nurture more good practice to reach a maturity

that will deliver sustainability for the future. Through 2024 we plan to focus on the following:

- ✓ A refreshed Participation Strategy building on the work of the Young Mayor's Team and Children in Care Council and enabling wider participation of children and young people with the Council.
- ✓ Developing a wider Family Help offer, as part of our new Family Hubs development – strengthening the prevention and early support opportunities for families.
- ✓ Transition the MASH into a Single Point of Contact for a broader range of services.
- ✓ Review and ensure there is a continuum of services to deliver Family Help, including those with complex needs and across the spectrum of neurodiversity to enable more CYP to live safely with their families.
- ✓ Implement the Lewisham Safeguarding Children Partnership Neglect Strategy
- ✓ Develop the Integrated Adolescent Service through strategic and operational plans, and the Lewisham Safeguarding Children Partnership Exploitation Strategy.
- ✓ Ensure health outcomes are improved, especially for CYP with Social, Emotional and Mental Health conditions through improved pathways and better identification of need early on.
- ✓ Strengthen transitions between CYP and Adults Services.
- ✓ Refresh our Corporate Parenting Strategy for 2024, to keep improving the care and post care experience that our CYP have.
- ✓ Continue to deliver our Placements Sufficiency Strategy – specifically increasing our pool of in-house foster carers and building Lewisham homes for more CYP in care to live locally in homes, with care that matches their needs and helps them remain connected to their networks.
- ✓ Expand the remit of the Principal Social Worker and Academy to deliver a learning and development offer and career framework for non/differently qualified staff including introduction of social work apprenticeships.
- ✓ Achieve our target of 90% permanent workforce, through the recruitment and retention strategy to attract more experienced practitioners.
- ✓ Keep strengthening collaborative working across the partnership and develop an approach to 'Think' family with Adults Services.
- ✓ Launch the commissioned dedicated offer to help more care leavers into ETE.
- ✓ Tackle race inequality and continue to drive changes to anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practice.
- ✓ Manage service delivery

9. Recommendations

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

10. Financial implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. At Period 4 Children's Social Care had a reported pressure of £9.1m, due to the level of high needs placements in comparison to 2022/23.

11. Legal implications

The Council must comply with its statutory duties to CYP 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.

12. 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.

13. Climate change and environments implications

There are no anticipated climate change and environmental implications arising from this report.

14. Crime and disorder implications

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

15. Health and wellbeing implications

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

16. Background papers

N/A

17. Report authors and contact

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Comments for and on behalf of the Executive Director for Corporate Resources

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