



## Overview and Scrutiny Committee

### **Report title: Update from the Cabinet Member for School Performance and Children's Services**

**Date:** 5 March 2020

**Key decision:** No.

**Class:** Part 1

**Ward(s) affected:** All

**Contributors:** Cllr Chris Barnham, Cabinet Member for School Performance and Children's Service

### **Outline and recommendation**

The purpose of this report is to update Overview and Scrutiny Committee on some of the achievements in the portfolio.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- Note this report
- Ask questions.

#### **1. Children's social care**

1.1. Ofsted in August 2019 found that Lewisham's children's social care service still required improvement. They acknowledged that "widespread improvement activity and whole-system cultural change" was underway, and the "pace of improvement had significantly accelerated", which was beginning to have an impact.

1.2. Work has continued on a comprehensive programme of improvement to provide better support for vulnerable children, to be recognised as 'good' by Ofsted, underpinned by a stable budget. There have been significant steps forward in the past year:

1.3. A new practice model - Signs of Safety – has been introduced, promoting children staying safely with their families, reducing escalation to child protection plans, court and care. The number of children subject to Child Protection Plans has reduced (from 260 in January to 216 in December); Court Proceedings are down; and the number of children looked after is lower (although still above comparable authorities).

1.4. The workforce is being strengthened - a refreshed senior management team is in place, supported by an additional layer of management to strengthen oversight. Workforce development is supported by partnership with Islington. Recruitment has gone well so far – January's campaign for newly-qualified social workers had 95 applicants, of which we selected the best 10. Bigger challenges lie ahead in recruiting to more senior roles, with stiff pay competition from other councils.

- 1.5. Management oversight and quality assurance are more rigorous – with improvements to performance data, audit and feedback. The budget has been comprehensively reviewed and refined, with new financial management systems for more robust oversight in 2020-21. The previous overspend has been largely eliminated by rightsizing the budget, and there is a stronger focus on, and understanding of, placement needs and resources, to inform a better strategy for placing looked after children in future.
- 1.6. Work is continuing to ensure reasonable caseloads are maintained, enabling better retention of social workers. The much-criticised IT case system has been redesigned to reduce bureaucracy, with a 33% increase in staff satisfaction.
- 1.7. The multi-agency safeguarding hub – which deals with initial notifications of concern regarding children – has been significantly improved. 92% of contacts now receive a response within one day (up from 27%). A new, dedicated young person's team (Safe Space), has been set up to work with the multi-agency Concern Hub, tackling criminal and sexual exploitation.
- 1.8. Looked After children are being visited more regularly by their social workers, and a new Care Leavers team has been set up. The proportion of our care leavers in education, employment or training is now joint 4<sup>th</sup> highest in London.
- 1.9. We are well on the way and must keep up momentum. Practice still requires significant improvement to be consistently good and big challenges remain, including investing in workforce training, where upskilling takes time. Other key priorities for this year include: improving early help and edge of care Family Support, to keep children from entering care unnecessarily; and better corporate parenting. Like most authorities, we can expect to face continuing demand pressures.

## **2. Education**

2.1 Schools are largely autonomous, but the Council supports them to improve by raising achievement at all levels and narrowing achievement gaps. Our aim is to foster an inclusive and high-performing family of Lewisham schools, where young people thrive, are safe and enjoy learning.

2.2 During the past year, key points to note include:

- 90% of Lewisham schools are good or better according to Ofsted. Prendergast Ladywell and St Matthew's improved to good this year, as did New Woodlands (meaning all special schools are at least good).
- Pupil outcomes remain generally good in early years and primary schools. At age 11, 68% were at expected levels in Reading, Writing & Maths, compared with national at 65%. Progress was in line with national average.
- After significant improvement in 2018, GCSE results suffered a disappointing dip last summer. Further improvement in secondary schools accordingly remains a priority for the new leadership of Lewisham Learning (where there is a new director and for the first time an independent Chair. They are supporting greater rigour in the partnership, monitoring and evaluating the impact of school improvement work through Rapid Improvement Boards. Lewisham Learning is also developing a stronger focus on tackling achievement gaps, including for Black Caribbean pupils.
- Welcome signs of growing parental confidence in schools – this year sees the highest number of preferences for Lewisham secondary schools in 10 years.

- 2.3 Permanent exclusions have continued to fall, as a result of good collaboration between schools and the local authority. In the most recent DfE figures (for 2017/18) Lewisham had no primary permanent exclusions. Exclusions from secondary schools were the highest in London in 2015/16, but have fallen consistently since then. Attendance at school is better than London and national averages.
- 2.4 We continue to work to ensure schools governing bodies are effective and reflect our diverse community. April 2019 data showed 23% of governors were BAME (against a national average of 4%). Since then, a recruitment campaign has targeted BAME applications: Governors for Schools have placed 16 governors within Lewisham schools of whom 31% were BAME. Another 11 volunteers are in line to join governing bodies at their next meetings, of whom 82% are BAME.
- 2.5 Like most councils, we face rising demand on special educational needs. Lewisham's performance in completing plans to time is higher than London and national averages. Expansion of in-borough special school capacity is in progress, and we have set up a SEND Schools Advisory Service to support inclusive practice in schools. There has been extensive co-production with children and parents on a new SEND strategy, about to be launched.
- 2.6 Looking ahead, Lewisham schools continue to move in the right direction. But much more needs to be done, including: a stronger school improvement framework to secure improvement in schools causing concern; work to tackle achievement gaps for specific groups; further reducing exclusions; supporting schools to be sustainable (through good finance support to all our schools), and continuing to build confidence.

### **3. Early Help**

- 3.1. It is increasingly clear that the success of schools, and social care support for vulnerable children, depends on effective and responsive early help services to help children, young people and families to thrive. The austerity of the past decade has eroded such services. A review of Early Help has led to a significant programme of change to improve our service offer and build a stronger and more coherent system-level approach. This is an important area of development in the year ahead, but key achievements so far include:
- 3.2. Recruitment of a new interim Director for Joint Commissioning and Early Help to drive development of targeted services
- 3.3. Simplified Early Help Assessment, and a new monthly multi-agency case formulation panel to discuss complex cases and foster cross-partner working.
- 3.4. Creation and expansion of a "Thrive Unit" (ongoing) as the first point of contact and assessment for targeted early help cases, with more capacity to undertake brief intervention and support. By April this should significantly reduce delays for assessment and intervention.
- 3.5. Variation to our targeted family support offer, to deliver more flexible interventions and reach more families across a greater breadth of need
- 3.6. A new Lewisham Youth Service specification, currently in negotiation stage, with a stronger focus on targeted youth work
- 3.7. Improved performance of specialist mental health services, with reduced waiting times and increased NHS funding. We also secured DfE funding for two Mental Health Support Teams, to help young people through more joined-up care and support across schools, colleges and specialist NHS services.
- 3.8. Key issues for the future include: the launch of the Early Help Strategy and i-Thrive approach in March; scoping a new in-house targeted offer and new menu of

interventions; confirmation of youth service delivery; and continued focus on resources for, and access to, mental health services.

#### **4. Financial implications**

4.1 This is a service update report. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, the service budgets will require close monitoring and potentially revision to progress on the three items of delivery as stated:

- Children's social care
- Education – in particular supporting school improvement
- Early help, to support children and families to prevent them running into difficulties

4.2 All costs are expected to be met from within the CYP Directorate budgets, with the exception of the work on the Controcc system (which links the children case management system to the Council's financial ledger, Oracle) to be funded corporately. Any other material decisions with financial implications will be brought back to M&C via specific service reports or through regular financial monitoring reports.

#### **5. Legal implications**

5.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from the contents of this report, save for noting the Council's obligations pursuant to the Equalities Act 2010.

#### **6. Equalities implications**

6.1 The equality implications are contained in the body of this report. The actions described in this report make a specific contribution to the following objectives in Lewisham's Comprehensive Equality Scheme 2016-20:

- Tackle victimisation, discrimination and harassment
- Improve access to services
- Close the gap in outcomes between citizens
- Increase mutual understanding and respect
- Increase participation and engagement

6.2 In particular, the activities described in this report reflect the Council's commitment to equalise life chances, improve life outcomes and tackle socio-economic barriers facing some of the borough's most vulnerable children, young people and families. Specific cohorts described in this report include: looked after children, pupils at risk of exclusion from school and those whose attainment outcomes are worse than those of their counterparts.

6.3 The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) introduced a public sector equality duty (the equality duty or the duty). It covers the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. In summary, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

6.4 It is not an absolute requirement to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct, or to promote equality of opportunity or foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. It is a duty to have due regard to the need to achieve the goals listed above.

6.5 The weight to be attached to the duty will be dependent on the nature of the decision and the circumstances in which it is made. This is a matter for the Mayor, bearing in mind the issues of relevance and proportionality. The Mayor must understand the impact or likely impact of the decision on those with protected characteristics who are potentially affected by the decision. The extent of the duty will necessarily vary from case to case and due regard is such regard as is appropriate in all the circumstances.

6.6 The Equality and Human Rights Commission has issued Technical Guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty and statutory guidance entitled "Equality Act 2010 Services, Public Functions & Associations Statutory Code of Practice". The Council must have regard to the statutory code in so far as it relates to the duty and attention is drawn to Chapter 11 which deals particularly with the equality duty. The Technical Guidance also covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty. This includes steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The guidance does not have statutory force but nonetheless regard should be had to it, as failure to do so without compelling reason would be of evidential value. The statutory code and the technical guidance can be found at: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/equality-act-codes-practice>

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/equality-act-technical-guidance>

6.7 The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has previously issued five guides for public authorities in England giving advice on the equality duty:

- [The essential guide to the public sector equality duty](#)
- [Meeting the equality duty in policy and decision-making](#)
- [Engagement and the equality duty: A guide for public authorities](#)
- [Objectives and the equality duty. A guide for public authorities](#)
- [Equality Information and the Equality Duty: A Guide for Public Authorities](#)

6.8 The essential guide provides an overview of the equality duty requirements including the general equality duty, the specific duties and who they apply to. It covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty including steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The other four documents provide more detailed guidance on key areas and advice on good practice. Further information and resources are available at: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty-guidance#h1>