



## **Children and Young People Select Committee**

### **Public Accounts Select Committee**

#### **Progress on Children's Social Care Improvement Programme And Placements sufficiency for children in care and care leavers**

**Date: 22 September (Children and Young People Select Committee)  
23 September (Public Accounts Select Committee)**

**Key decision:** No.

**Class:** Part 1

**Ward(s) affected:** All

**Contributors:**

Harriet Jannetta, Head of Service Corporate Parenting.

Lucie Heyes, Director Children's Social Care.

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

#### **Outline and recommendations**

This report seeks to provide Members of both Children and Young People Select Committee and Public Accounts Select Committee with an update on:

- a) The improvement work carried out by Children's Social Care, including the outcomes of a recent Ofsted focussed visit to examine our support for children in care. Appendix 1 is the letter published by Ofsted on 31 August 2021 following their focussed visit inspection in July.
- b) Summary of the work taking place to increase our placements sufficiency for children in care and care leavers.

## 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 June 2021. This report summarises the key issues.

1.2 Throughout the pandemic we have been continually adapting ways of working, which impacted on our ability to maintain the pace of improvement set in 2019. However Covid did not set us back, all key performance indicators have improved, with the exception of in-house foster placements. Quality assurance indicates a positive trajectory with 30% improvement in practice quality. The permanent staffing ratio has increased to 80% compared to 64% in 2018.

1.3 There is still much more to do to reach and sustain all our targets and the majority of practice continues to require improvement, however we have seen a steady positive shift and we believe we are on course to deliver children's social work to a consistently good standard by the end of 2022.

1.4 In July 2021 Ofsted completed a focused visit on children in care to seek assurance that the improvement plan they had seen in their last inspection (July 2019) had continued and was having a positive impact. Ofsted's key feedback from the recent focused visit was as follows:

- 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.
- When children cannot live with their families, authoritative action is taken to protect and safeguard them.
- Social workers know their children well and are passionate advocates.
- Children said that they feel valued by their carers and are being well supported.
- Staff morale is high. Workers report feeling supported by visible and approachable managers and senior leaders.

1.5 The Ofsted report also notes areas for further improvement. All of these had already been identified by the self-assessment and actions are underway to address them.

### 1.6 Placements for children in care and care leavers

At the time of writing this report Lewisham is the corporate parent for 480 children in care (also known as Children Looked After /CLA) and 571 care leavers for whom we need to provide care and suitable accommodation. Section 4 provides a breakdown of where all those children and young people are living/placed.

1.7 Every Local Authority is required to have a placements Sufficiency Strategy to provide care and accommodation for its children in care and care leavers. Lewisham's existing strategy is due for renewal in 2022 and is currently being revised. What we have learned from the difficulties experienced since the last strategy was written, is our thinking and approach needs to be far more expansive and creative if we are to achieve affordable placement sufficiency. The national placement market has become increasingly difficult to manage and the needs of our ever changing care population

are more complex than in the past. At a national level, councils have been finding it difficult for many years to control the costs of placements and ensure children are looked after in a placement close to home, Lewisham shares these challenges.

- 1.8 This report provides an overview of the actions we are taking to increase our placements sufficiency, which can be summarised by six key aims:
- Expanding the pool, diversity and resilience of our local in-house foster carers.
  - Improving our systems and support to enable more regulated family and friendship or kinship/connected care arrangements to provide permanence.
  - Getting better value, quality, flexibility and stability from our externally commissioned placements.
  - Ensuring the cost of placements for very complex children is proportionately shared between Children's Social Care, Health and Education Services.
  - Creating and commissioning more local residential provision for young people who are difficult to place.
  - Developing more cost effective accommodation options for 16/17 year olds and housing pathways for our care leavers.

## 2. Recommendations

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

## 3. Policy Context

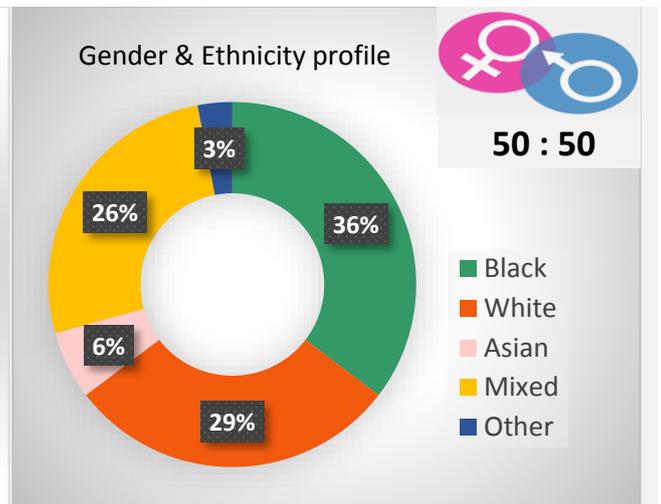
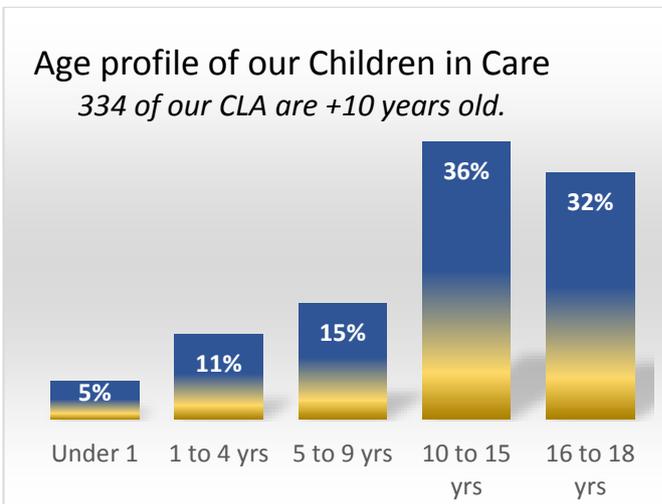
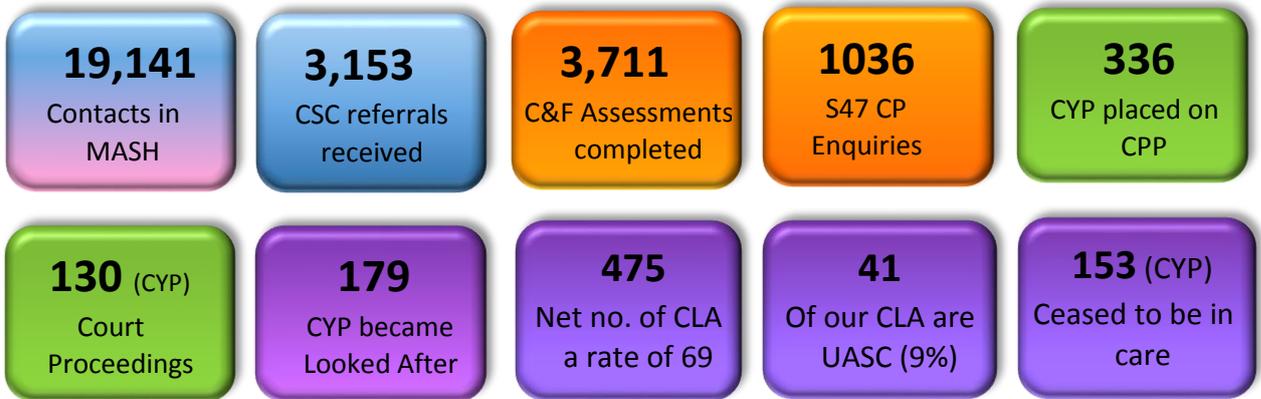
- 3.1 The Children's Social Care improvement programme contributes to the following key priority outcome of Lewisham's Corporate Strategy: Giving children and young people the best start in life. It specifically helps deliver against the following commitments:
- We will improve our children's social care services to provide support for families at the earliest opportunity.
  - We will ensure that the children in our care are safe and supported to achieve the very best in life.
  - We will work tirelessly with our partners to keep Lewisham's children and young people safe from exploitation, violence and serious youth crime.
  - We will monitor the services we provide for children and young people to ensure they deliver the best outcomes and best value.
  - We will ensure that families from our BAME communities have equal access to care and support.
  - We will work with our partners to ensure that young people transitioning into adulthood achieve the best possible outcomes in relation to education, work, healthy lives and strong community connections.
- 3.2 Placements for children in care and care leavers  
Section 22G of the Children's Act 1989 places a legal duty on Local Authorities to take steps to secure, as far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for children in care and care leavers within their local authority area. The Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children (2010) states that local authorities should have embedded plans, as part of their commissioning processes and through partnership working, to meet this duty.

#### 4. Background – the children and young people we are working with



Children being supported by CSC (As at 31/3/21)

- Being assessed
- In need receiving services
- With complex needs
- Subject to Child Protection Plans
- Looked After
- Care Leavers



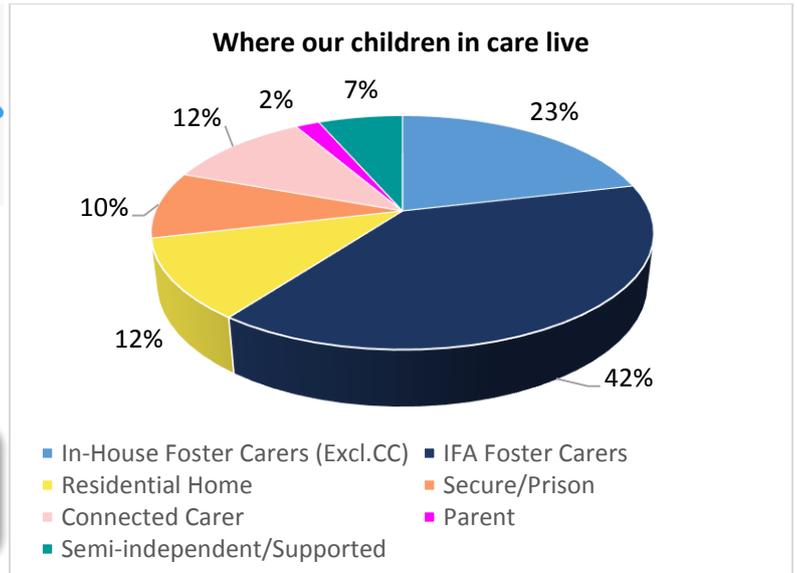
**170 (36%)** Living in Lewisham



**96 (20%)** Placed 20+ miles from home

**7%**  
3+ placements

**71%**  
In same placement 2+ years



**575 CARE LEAVERS**

**413** With an allocated personal advisor & active pathway plan.

**92%** In suitable accommodation. Includes **18%** Staying Put with carers

**266** Live in Lewisham

## 5. The impact of the Covid pandemic

- 5.1 Within weeks of the first lockdown Children’s Social Care had adjusted its ways of working, which have continued to alter throughout the pandemic. Our approach was to maintain the usual frequency of statutory activity, convert some face to face contact to ‘virtual’ for all but the most vulnerable. These were mostly children on child protection plans and particularly vulnerable children in care and care leavers. Systems for monitoring school attendance were established with the Education Service. Food parcels and laptops were distributed and financial assistance was provided to support foster carers and for care leavers.
- 5.2 Children’s Social Care has continued to operate out of Laurence House and visit families face to face throughout. During March -June, in accordance with government guidance to ‘stay at home’, approximately 70% of the workforce worked remotely. As lockdown eased through June –December 2020 most staff returned to the office part time in bubbles and 80% of visits were being carried out face to face. During the January – March 2021 lockdown we switched back, but have since resumed all face to face visiting and most statutory meetings continue to be a hybrid.
- 5.3 Through the pandemic we have experienced increased demand as a result of more acute need, added complexity and more seriousness of harm in families, particularly in relation to babies/infants, domestic abuse, parental mental health and substance misuse. Conversely, initially we saw a reduction in missing episodes and youth offending. In the first half of the year those subject to child protection plans and court

proceedings increased as we were less able to manage risk in the community. Some of our Care Leavers have been hit hardest by losing employment and experiencing increased isolation.

- 5.4 Some permanence planning for children in care slowed, because introduction meetings for potential adopters, carer assessments and rehabilitation home work all proved more difficult to undertake virtually with the same degree of quality. Consequently we believe more children have spent longer in the statutory system than we might ordinarily expect. This has also meant increased caseloads and additional financial pressure being placed on the directorate.

## **6. The Children's Social Care improvement journey**

### **6.1 Leadership and management**

The new Director of Children's Services started in June 2020. The Youth Offending Service moved from the Adults directorate to Children's, together with the Young Mayor's Team and a third division within the directorate, entitled Families, Quality & Commissioning will commence this autumn. This directorate will be leading on:

- Implementing the targeted Early Help and Family Thrive service and leading on the wider Prevention and Early Help strategy.
- Developing a more coordinated and targeted approach to working with adolescents, including those who are vulnerable to exploitation.
- Developing a wider approach to earlier emotional health and wellbeing support. The Mental Health in Schools team will be expanded in 2021/22.
- Increasing capacity for quality assurance, performance and policy development.

- 6.2 The programme to modernise our ICT systems, (LCS/EHM/ControCC) that started in 2019 has continued throughout 2020, this has contributed to a reduction in bureaucracy to create more time for direct work, but there is more to do. We have stable management in most parts of the service and we know from our staff feedback and Ofsted's report that practitioners feel their senior management team are visible, approachable and they feel supported by their managers and supervision is happening regularly.

### **6.3 Workforce and caseloads**

There are 390 staff in Children's Social Care with an additional 18 in the Children with Complex Needs Service. Throughout 2020 we have worked on stabilising our workforce and we have nearly doubled the number of permanent appointments made. As at the end of March 2021 permanent staffing was up from 64% (2018) to 80%. Lewisham has the 12<sup>th</sup> highest retention rate in London.

- 6.4 A varied CPD programme has now been developed for 2021/21. In early 2020, alongside our Workforce Development Strategy, we launched our Practice Handbook, bringing together our vision, values and practice standards. An academy was launched with 25 NQ Social Workers joining in year one.

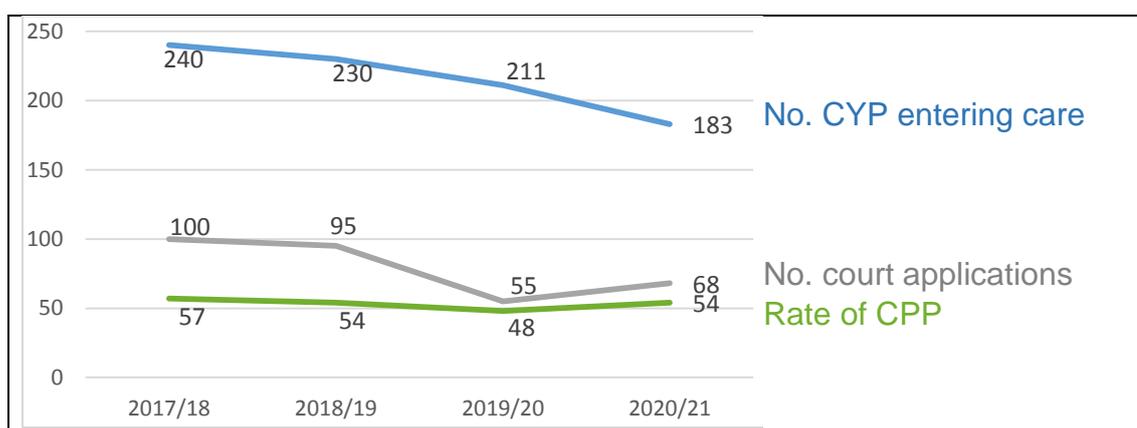
- 6.5 As a result of Covid, increased demand, slower throughput of cases, more serious and complex situations and the challenge of recruiting good agency staff, there has

been significant strain on workloads for all services at different points through the year. Many of our social workers have had caseloads above our guide numbers, additional staff have been temporarily added to alleviate the workload pressure, but this is impacting on our capacity to significantly improve quality as well as the increasing financial pressure.

#### 6.6 Early Help and Safeguarding

In 2020/21, resources across the Early Help system were repurposed including new contracts for Youth Services and we have moved more resource into our new in house Family Thrive service and the Early Help Strategy plans to move towards a family hub approach. We still have more to do to ensure that families do not face a delay in receiving support, with demand still higher than capacity.

6.7 A Domestic Abuse Strategic Board has been established, a new strategy is currently being finalised and Lewisham successfully bid for innovation grants to strengthen Domestic Abuse services. Developments in the MASH have continued to maximise partnership working and there is consistently timely decision making (90% of contacts responded to in 1 day), with good threshold application.



6.8 Since early 2019, all decisions to bring a child into care have to be ratified at a weekly resources panel, chaired by the Operational Director. This has created consistency in decision making. Coupled with stronger management oversight and a sustained change in practice culture through the introduction of Signs of Safety, the rate of children in court and entering care has fallen, to become more comparable with other London Boroughs. However the overall net number of children in care has remained broadly the same for the last three years and is higher (r70) than our statistical neighbours (r64) largely due to the legacy of historical social work practice.

6.8 With developments to strengthen our ‘edge of care’ family support services, we aim to continue that downward trend to be within 130–150 per annum over the next three years. However, more capacity is needed to continue this trajectory. Through 2020 we remodelled our existing resources to create an enhanced Family Support Service, which is scheduled to go live in late 2021.

6.9 150 of our current children in care are aged 16 or 17, who will be exiting care at 18 years old. Therefore if current demand entering care does not increase, we forecast the net overall number of children in care to gradually fall over the next three years.

Conversely the net number of care leavers will increase over the same time period, before this too is likely to start reducing.

- 6.10 The Safe Space exploitation team and the recently established dedicated missing officers now have a better understanding of the profile of children and young people who go missing and are at risk of exploitation, but local intelligence still requires collation and analysis. Building on what we have learned so far, the LSCP exploitation strategy aims to better target multi-agency activity to this effect. Much more work is also required to strengthen our services for adolescents on the edge of care as a result of criminal, sexual exploitation and violence. This will be a priority for the incoming Director of Families, Quality & Commissioning.
- 6.11 Children in Care (Looked After) and Care Leavers  
This year we have been developing our Corporate Parenting Strategy with six key aims to be the best corporate parents we can be and achieve our ambition to make sure every child has a positive care and post care experience. Throughout 2020 we have continued to see our children in care regularly whether face to face or virtually, 88% of visits and 96% of Review meetings have been carried out in timescale. For our Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children better utilisation of Home Office funding and also working closely with the Refugee Council, Red Cross and police and health colleagues means that our specialist team can provide enhanced support.
- 6.12 Despite the challenges, there was no drop in school attendance, fixed term exclusions did not increase (0.2%) and attainment remained above the national average, with more young people attending higher education. 96% of Review Health Assessments are held in time, but we still need to improve the timeliness of our Initial Health Assessments and Covid has impacted on dental examinations. In January 2020 we also contracted a new provider for Advocacy and Independent Visiting, which has improved uptake.
- 6.13 A focus on improving permanence planning is beginning to see better outcomes. The number of children who have care plans that involve being with family has doubled since last year. The expansion of our Special Guardianship team means we are now better placed to support such extended care arrangements.
- 6.14 Ofsted's focused visit on Children in Care provides more details of improvements in this area of the service - see Appendix 1.
- 6.15 After creating a dedicated Care Leaver Service in spring 2019 the teams have established themselves to deliver improvements in all aspects of performance. 145 of our care leavers are enrolled on the I-Aspire programme which aims to engage more young people in education training and employment. Covid impeded progress but some good outcomes have been achieved, 57% of our Care Leavers are in Education, Employment or Training (EET) an improvement on previous years, and comparable with other LA's but still below our aspirational target of >70%.

6.16 Overall despite the challenges, all key performance indicators have improved with the exception of the number of children in care in foster placements and our quality assurance indicates a positive trajectory with more practice judged as good or better and less inadequate practice compared to 2019, a 30% uplift in the last 12 months.

6.17 A Lewisham Internal Audit conducted in April 2021 on the improvement plan implementation found the following:

**2. Assurance Opinion and Recommendations Made**

Children’s Social Care (CSC) Improvement Progress has an assurance rating of Substantial. No recommendations have been raised as part of the audit review.

6.18 Senior leaders recognise there is still much more to do to reach and sustain all our targets and the majority of practice continues to require improvement, however we have seen a steady positive shift in practice quality. Our key priorities for improvement for the next 12 months are as follows:

<p><b>FINANCE</b> Embed new budgetary controls to manage within existing budgets.</p>	<p><b>INFRASTRUCTURE</b> Reduce bureaucracy for more direct work with families.</p>	<p><b>EARLY HELP</b> Implement strategy with continuum of services, through family hubs.</p>
<p><b>QUALITY ASSURANCE</b> Embed management oversight &amp; reflective supervision.</p>	<p><b>WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT</b> Deliver strategy for a permanent, skilled workforce.</p>	<p><b>PRACTICE STANDARDS</b> Embed standards and Signs of Safety, strengthening practice and building a learning culture.</p>
<p><b>CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS</b> Implement SEND strategy, improve information sharing and multi-agency EHCPs</p>	<p><b>SUPPORTING FAMILIES</b> Introduce our expanded Family Support Service and improve access to emotional health &amp; wellbeing services.</p>	<p><b>DOMESTIC ABUSE</b> Deliver strategy. Implement programmes of support and increase skills and confidence of staff.</p>
<p><b>SAFEGUARDING</b> Continue to strengthen all core areas of practice.</p>	<p><b>EXPLOITATION &amp; OFFENDING</b> Deliver Exploitation Strategy and develop a wider targeted youth/adolescent service.</p>	<p><b>PERMANENCE PLANS</b> Revise support for family based care, strengthen early permanence plans and life story work</p>
<p><b>PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY</b> Deliver Sufficiency Strategy, increase in-house carers. Achieve VFM placements and housing for Care Leavers</p>	<p><b>CORPORATE PARENTING</b> Deliver the strategy’s pledge: Embedding Corporate Parenting across the whole Council.</p>	<p><b>GOOD TRANSITIONS</b> Streamlined step up /down between services. Strengthen children’s to adults service transitions.</p>

## 7. Placements for children in care and care leaver accommodation

- 7.1 Children's Services are in the process of refreshing its Sufficiency Strategy which includes fostering recruitment and retention. With assistance from our Partners in Practice (LB Islington), a dedicated programme to review and re-shape our placement service to meet the challenges ahead is currently being scoped. To support this programme a new Sufficiency Board chaired by the Executive Director will start in September to oversee the delivery of the Sufficiency Strategy.
- 7.2 This report provides an overview of the actions we are taking to increase our placements sufficiency, which can be summarised by six key aims:
- Expanding the pool, diversity and resilience of our local in-house foster carers.
  - Improving our systems and support to enable more regulated family and friendship or kinship/connected care arrangements to provide permanence.
  - Getting better value, quality, flexibility and stability from our externally commissioned placements.
  - Ensuring the cost of placements for very complex children is proportionately shared between Children's Social Care, Health and Education Services.
  - Creating local residential provision for young people who are difficult to place.
  - Developing more cost effective accommodation options for 16/17 year olds and housing pathways for our care leavers.
- 7.3 Children in foster care  
In England 72% of children in care live in foster placements, in Lewisham this is 75%, but only 23% live with Lewisham's in-house carers, as opposed to commissioned Independent Fostering Arrangements (IFA's). In well performing London Boroughs placements with in-house carers is nearer to 40%. Recruitment activity through 2018-20 to increase our pool of in-house carers had limited success and simultaneously existing carer capacity was lost, usually for positive reasons i.e. becoming special guardians, but this meant we had no net gain of carers. Lewisham currently has 88 approved in-house Foster Carers with the capacity to care for 175 children.
- 7.4 Lewisham relies heavily on IFA placements. There are not necessarily differences in the quality of foster placements provided by IFA's; we have some very good partnership arrangements with local IFA agencies and many of the IFA carers live in Lewisham. A key benefit of having children with in-house carers is that they are more closely connected to the service, with closer relationships to our fostering supervising social work team. But the most significant factor is cost, the average cost of an IFA is significantly more expensive than an in-house carer.
- 7.5 Location of placements and placement stability  
Nationally 73% of children in care are placed within 20 miles of their home and 58% are placed in their Borough/Council. 79% of Lewisham's CLA are within 20 miles of their family, but 66% are not in Lewisham, which is not atypical of London Boroughs. The number of CLA being placed 'at a distance' has been slowly increasing due to the difficulty of finding more local placements.
- 7.6 Lewisham compares well to other London Boroughs and has not been significantly impacted by Covid, 72% of our long term placements have been stable for at least

two years and only 8% of CLA have had multiple placements. This is a positive aspect of our placement sufficiency and we aim to maintain good performance.

7.7 Our aim is for more children to be placed closer to home, so that more children with complex needs can live with foster carers. In doing this we will need to maintain good placement stability while improving the care experience for children. Our foster carer recruitment and retention strategy is being redrafted, including exploring different approaches to attracting and retaining carers. Our target is an annual net gain of 20 carers per year over the next three years, who provide respite care, and parent/baby placements. To achieve this, a more varied marketing approach using different platforms to is required. This will include:

- A multi-channel marketing and publicity plan will be built upon to reach key audiences. This will include some partnership working where possible with local businesses, community groups as well as schools
- Utilising existing carers as advocates at information events.
- Increasing our online presence through social and digital media
- Re-launching the foster carer referral scheme for existing foster carers and council staff with an increased reward of £1000.
- To equip our carers to better manage children with complex and/or challenging behaviours we have an improved training programme and introduced therapeutic support to our carers to prevent breakdowns in placements.

7.8 Permanence is the term used to describe the long term care plan for where the child will live through their minority. Permanence planning should start at the point a child enters care and be regularly reviewed until they are either rehabilitated home, adopted, matched with long term foster carers or transitioned into a special guardianship arrangement. New monitoring arrangements have been introduced to ensure permanence plans are now in place early, to move children into permanent arrangements (and out of the care system) as soon as possible.

7.9 We are developing more support for Special Guardians (SG), that includes family and friend connected carers as well as foster carers. We expanded the SG service in March 2020 who can now support all our SG carers with training and therapeutic intervention. We have also re-written our financial entitlements policy for SG and connected carers, together these measures enable more children to remain within their extended network. 46% of children in care now have permanency plans that involve being with family, compared to 24% in January 2020 and those placed in Connected Carer arrangements (with Friends and Family) has increased.

#### 7.10 Children in residential homes and secure units

One of the biggest challenges facing Children's Services nationally has been the shortage of good quality and good value placements. 12% of our children in care are placed in residential homes, which is in line with the national average and we do not expect to see the percentage in residential care significantly fall. By reducing the numbers entering care it means that those in the care system are the most vulnerable and increasing complex. Some of our young people present danger to foster carers, such as connection to gangs, serious violence, criminal and sexual exploitation. A third of those in residential placements have complex additional needs and disabilities.

- 7.11 In the most exceptional circumstances some children are placed in secure children's homes (SCH). SCHs are specialist placements authorised to care for children aged between 10 and 17 in a secured environment. This includes both 'justice' children who have been sentenced or remanded by a criminal court and 'welfare' children by a family court because they are a risk to themselves or others and have a history of absconding. A common factor shared by children in SCHs is a very high level of vulnerability. Their complex needs can include: speech and language problems; physical and learning disability; severe trauma; mental health issues and behavioural disorders such as ADHD.
- 7.12 Of the 13 SCHs operating in England at March 2019, providing a total 206 beds, 6 take only welfare children; 2 only justice children and the other 5 are mixed. SCHs lack sufficient capacity to provide a place for all young people referred to them for welfare reasons. Nevertheless, the Local Authority still needs to find a placement. In order to achieve this Deprivation of Liberty Orders (DOLs) are sometimes used as an alternative, to ensure that a child is both under continuous supervision and control and is not free to leave the home. The Local Authority need to make an application to the Family Court and must meet the same criteria as is used when applying for a secure accommodation order. On the 6<sup>th</sup> August 2021 The Supreme Court voiced its 'deep anxiety' over the ongoing shortage of secure accommodation for children and stated that the use of DOLs is an *"imperfect stop gap, and not a long term solution."*
- 7.13 Once the decision has been made to apply to the courts for a DOLs the second problem that Local Authorities are faced with is finding a regulated placement that will accept a child who is subject to a DOLs. The demand for regulated placements is extremely high and this can mean that the child will be placed in a solo placement which are very expensive, have to be set up at short notice and are often unregulated.
- 7.14 At any one time Lewisham usually has just one or two young people placed in secure accommodation on welfare grounds and a similar number placed with DOL's. These children are exceptionally difficult to place.
- 7.15 In 2020 we refreshed our approach to monitoring high cost placements. The Executive Director now chairs a monthly panel scrutinising arrangements for residential placements. This has provided robust oversight of spend and improved placement planning.
- Since late 2020 the Lewisham place based commissioners of the SE London CCG are represented at placement panel, which identifies contributions for specific health needs in care placements, resulting in increased costs being shared across the three key partners. In 2020 the contributions from the CCG for placements was £1,014,579; current projections for 2021 are £1,052,540.
  - Historically due to a lack of effective reporting systems and business support capacity, Children's Services had not been claiming all the grants it was entitled to for each UASC. This year, a programme to recover unclaimed grants and put in mechanisms to ensure grants are claimed correctly has been introduced.
  - We are currently planning the remodelling of our placements service to improve our commissioning arrangements and better utilise existing consortiums. We are part of the South London Consortium where alongside 8 other boroughs placements are procured through a unified process. This ensures quality and

value for money, through the consortium we are better able to manage costs through maximising our purchasing power.

- The financial system that assists to monitor placement costs (ControCC) has been re-designed and mapped against all new cost centres, this is connected to LCS (Children's database) and Oracle. A placements tracker was created to monitor all our placement arrangements and associated costs and to ensure no providers were being paid after placements had ceased.

#### 7.16 Unregulated placements

Under the Care Standards Act (2000), services that provide both care and accommodation for young people under the age of 18 are required to register with Ofsted. Provision for children in care that is not required to register with Ofsted (unregulated provision) includes accommodation for children (usually over the age of 16) who need support to live semi-independently rather than full-time care.

- 7.17 The majority of semi-independent/supported housing placements are not regulated in the same way as children's homes. Poor outcomes for young people in unregulated placements has received considerable attention of late and as of September 2021, it will not be legal to place a child under the age of 16 in an unregulated placement. There is also a national debate taking place about whether all placements for children under 18 should be regulated. In February 2020 Ofsted published a research report on unregulated and unregistered provision. They reported:

*"...the growth in the use of unregulated and unregistered provision for children with complex needs and/or challenging behaviour is being driven by two interrelated factors. The first is that demand for registered places is currently outstripping supply. This is consistent with indications from Ofsted that supply is not keeping pace with demand (Cowen and Rowe, 2018) ...The second factor ... is that registered children's homes are becoming increasingly reluctant to accept children with highly complex needs and challenging behaviours..."*

- 7.18 Lewisham has to use unregulated placements for specific young people where it has not been possible to identify a regulated placement. For example, we are supporting a young person under the age of 16 who has a very complex history and for whom, after an unsuccessful search of over 200 placements, Lewisham had to create a bespoke arrangement. Placing a child under 16 in an unregulated provision is never a choice, it arises because of a lack of placements, but whenever we do so we must ensure that the care arrangements are safe and secure. For this particular young person, they have a comprehensive care package and have been doing better in the current arrangement than in any previous regulated establishment.

- 7.19 In February 2021 the Government set out regulations to prohibit the placement of under 16s in unregulated placements. On the 26<sup>th</sup> July 2021 they launched a capital investment bidding round of £19.5m in match funding to support local authorities to increase their own residential provision. Lewisham want to take full advantage of this match funding to provide regulated solo placements for children who are subject to a DOLs. We are currently working with an independent provider to develop a bid which if successful will provide two solo placements for this particular cohort. This will significantly reduce the high costs associated with these emergency placements (average £9000 a week) and will also improve the quality of the care provided.

#### 7.20 Semi Independent Provision

This is accommodation where children usually aged 16 or 17 receive support as they move towards independence. Supported living is not regulated by Ofsted. These placements form a vital part of the care system in meeting the needs of older children who are ready to live with an increased level of independence. These placements are visited by our commissioning services on an annual basis to ensure that they meet the required standards. The children continue to have an allocated social worker who visits at a minimum of every six weeks. They have a pathway plan which is reviewed by an Independent Reviewing Officer every six months, a minimum of five hours a week key worker support and at the age of 17 and a half they are also allocated a Personal Advisor.

#### 7.21 Staying put

Statutory guidance on Staying Put was published in May 2013. The intention of this approach is to ensure that young people can remain with their former foster carer/s until they are prepared for adulthood, and experience a transition akin to their peers, avoiding social exclusion and reducing the likelihood of subsequent housing and tenancy breakdown. In Lewisham we have 70 young people 'staying put'. 21 of these young people are placed with our in-house foster carers. This is a great outcome for the young people and as part of our Corporate Parenting Strategy we aim to increase the number of young people Staying Put. It does however mean a net loss of 15 in-house foster carers who might otherwise care for children in care.

#### 7.22 Supported Lodgings

The Children Leaving Care Act 2000 provides the legal framework for establishing Supported Lodgings Schemes. In some ways this is similar to fostering, but is intended to meet the needs of young people over 16, with the focus being more on living an independent life, but having some emotional support available when needed. The expectation is that providers commit to providing a minimum of 10 hours per week on independence skills. Currently, Lewisham has 21 supported lodgings provider households (up from 14 in 2020/21) who have a total of 27 spaces for young people. Also, there are 12 applicants being assessed. The ambition is to expand the scheme by 10 providers' year on year.

7.23 Working closely with Housing, Children's Social Care has been developing alternative, lower cost, high quality housing provision that meets the needs of our young people. This includes:

- Ring fencing 35 places on the Young Person's Supported Housing Pathway
- Expanding Care Leavers provision on the Young Person's Supported Housing pathway by an additional 20 places
- Piloting the use of non-commissioned providers of Care Leaver provision – 12 places initially, growing provision slowly year on year
- Expansion of Supported Lodgings by 6 places year on year
- Plans to refurbish two council properties by partnering with a registered provider to deliver support and accommodation for 8 Care Leavers and 5 places for 16 & 17 year old children in care.

7.24 The above initiatives on care leaver accommodation are expected to lead to a large reduction in the use of semi-independent provision and reduce spend of up to £3m by the end of 2023/24.

## 8. Children's Social Care Budget

8.1 The financial position of Children's Social Care is set out below. The relative costs per week of different forms of care provision are provided in the table below which provides the current average cost for each form of accommodation.

In-house foster care	SG carer	IFA	Residential	Secure and/or complex DOLs/ bespoke placement	Semi-independent accommodation	Supported Lodgings
£400	£190	£1,000	£4,500	£6,500	£1,500	£240

8.2 In 2019/20 the Children's Social Care budget was set at £41.5m. Against this budget the service spend was reported at £45.8m, reflecting an overspend position of £4.3m. It should be noted that in addition to the £41.5m budget an additional £7m was made available from the Councils Corporate Resources to support the expected demand position.

8.3 For 2020/21 the budget was set at a net £41.1m with a continuation of £7m support from the Councils Corporate Resources plus a further £1.2m to support increase demand in respect of placements and other demand led costs such as other care costs and legal costs, previously offset by underspends in the Nil resources to public funds budget.

8.4 At the end of 2020/21 CSC reported an overspend of £3.5m after adjusting for Covid related costs. The overspend solely within the placements budget and represented a £0.8m improvement on the previous year.

### Children's Social Care Outturn Position for 2020/21

Net budget 2020/21	Final Outturn 2020/21	Final Outturn Variance (Under) Spend 2020/21	Final Outturn Covid-19 related Variance 2020/21	Final Outturn Non Covid-19 related Variance 2020/21
£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
41.1	48.8	7.7	3.5	4.2

8.5 The management action to strengthen and formalise systems included the following:

- Review of finance system (ContrOCC), to ensure improved performance management information was able to monitor financial pressures and bring action in place quickly to address it
- Review and re-alignment of historic budget and coding structures including budget holder responsibility

- Implementation of a placements tracker to facilitate data capture and reconciliation with sub-systems e.g Controc, Oracle etc. This also ensured that we didn't continue to pay for a placement after it had ceased and movements of children across placements was linked to procurement and contract management decisions
- Fortnightly high cost placement panel review meetings –attended by various stakeholders including Health, Housing, SEN etc. The meetings are chaired by the Executive Director of CYP and provided a strong forum for review of high cost placements including review of partner funding.
- A joint programme with Housing to provide suitable accommodation for young people who become homeless and care leavers. Actions currently underway will also lead to reductions in spend in future years as investment is made in more appropriate accommodation and new joint protocols to support this
- Working with young people and external providers to ensure that the fee structure for housing young people over the age of 18 includes maximisation of income from housing benefits.
- Improve data capture and timely submissions to the Home Office to maximise income from a grant that supports children and young people who are unaccompanied asylum seekers
- Improving recruitment and retention process for social workers thereby reducing dependency on agency workers which are more expensive
- Focus on effective commissioning to drive down average costs of placements, this includes working with the South London Consortium to agree best price structure.
- Building new early help and prevention services that support children earlier on.
- Developing clear strategies and priorities, including a Prevention & Early Help Strategy, a refreshed Childcare Sufficiency Strategy, a Corporate Parenting Strategy and an Asset Management Strategy.

## 8.6 2021/22 and future years

The table below shows the general fund available to CYP and includes additional CSC grant and continuation of funding from the corporate resources reserves. As part of the Medium term planning process (and including as part of the councils overall savings target, there continues to be an understanding that CYP may overspend by a maximum value of £4m. The expectation is that the service will achieve the overall savings targets and demand led savings to progress towards a balanced budget position in future years.

<b>CSC Budget 2021/22</b>	<b>£m</b>
2020/21 General Fund	41.1
Savings	(0.7)
Pressures	0.41
	40.8
Corporate funding including CSC grant	7.9
<b>Total Funding for CSC from LB</b>	<b>48.7</b>

- 8.7 In addition the service is expected to continue reducing overspend by £2.875m. Whilst the service continues to embed changes there is a recognition that CSC could potentially overspend by 2021/22 by up to of £4m this has been taken into consideration when setting the Councils overall medium term financial strategy.
- 8.8 There are risks attached with the above illustration including:
- **Increase in demand.** There are various reasons that may increase demand for services provided including the socio-economic position within the borough with the potential for increased family breakdown.
  - **Local or National Policy** Potential impact of changes in either, for example the potential impact of the DfE drive towards schools converting to academy status
  - **Recruitment and retention issues** (including skills shortage resulting in upward pressure on costs).
  - **Price increases** including inflation, supply and demand variations.
  - **Changes in funding** that support the spend areas for CYP including the Social Care Grant, Dedicated Schools Grant, Troubled Families Grant, UASC grant, health funding etc.

## 9. Financial Implications

- 9.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. This report recognises the work CSC is undertaking to reduce the pressure on the CSC overall budget position. The MTFs recognises that 2021/22 could potentially see an overspend of upto £4m. Actions noted in this report are intended to support a overall balanced position going forward. The report does however note potential risks, including demand and price variation.

## Report Author and Contact

Harriet Jannetta, Head of Service for Corporate Parenting.

[HarrietJannetta@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:HarrietJannetta@lewisham.gov.uk)

Lucie Heyes, Director Children's Social Care, 0208 314 8140,

[Lucie.Heyes@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:Lucie.Heyes@lewisham.gov.uk)