



## Children and Young People Select Committee

### Children's Social Care Improvement

**Date:** March 2022

**Key decision:** No.

**Class:** Part 1

**Ward(s) affected:** All

**Contributors:**

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### Outline and recommendations

This report provides the Children and Young People Select Committee with a progress update on the ongoing actions and activities undertaken by Children Social Care Services, in response to recommendations from their July 2019 Ofsted inspection and follow-up focussed visit. It also provides the outcome of the latest Ofsted Social Care annual engagement meeting held in November 2021.

### Timeline of engagement and decision-making

Not applicable

## 1. Summary

- 1.1. Following the launch of the inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (LACS) framework, Lewisham Children Service was subject to an unannounced three-week inspection in July 2019, and the service was graded as 'required improvement' (RI) The Service has further received a follow-up Ofsted focussed visit in July 2021 which was published on their website on 31 August 2021 and can be viewed [here](#)

- 1.2. Children's social care has been on an improvement journey since 2018 and developed an improvement plan for delivery of the service. This was formerly overseen by the Children Social Care Improvement Board. Governance and oversight of the plan are now provided through the Children and Young People Directorate management. Key milestones of the improvement activity are tracked and monitored through an annual self-assessment. The next annual self-assessment will be completed in May/June of this year and will be the key document used for any inspection we receive in the following 12 month period.
- 1.3. Despite the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have made significant and continued progress in meeting our objectives and commitment to improving outcomes for Lewisham Children and Young People. We however recognise that there is still much more to do to reach and sustain all our targets on course to deliver children's social work to a consistently good standard by the end of 2022.

## **2. Recommendations**

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

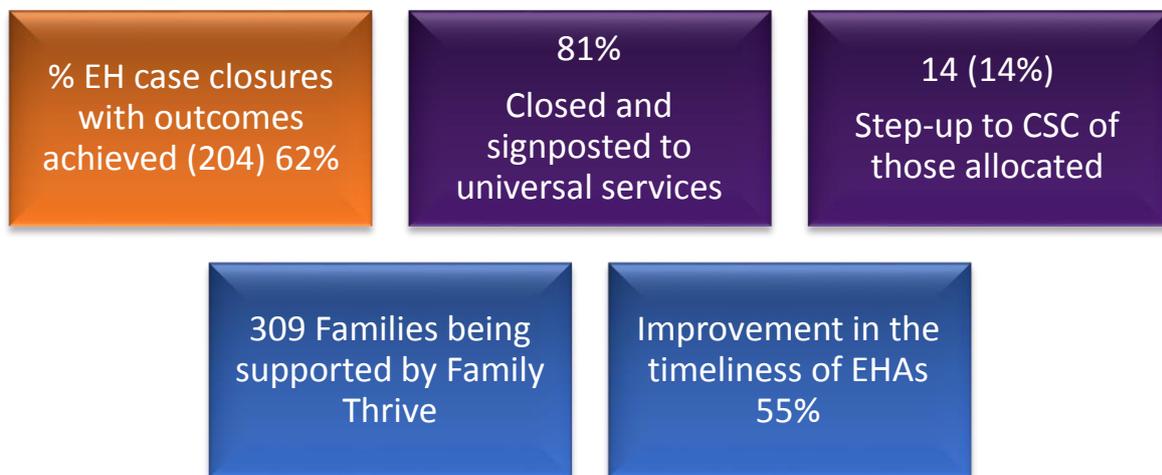
## **3. Policy Context**

- 3.1 The Children's Social Care improvement programme contributes to the following key priority outcome of Lewisham's Corporate Strategy 2018-2022
- 3.2 Giving children and young people the best start in life by ensuring that every child has access to an outstanding education and is given the support they need to keep them safe, well, and able to achieve their full potential
- 3.3 The CSC improvement programme 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.

**4. Background – Profile of Children supported by Children’s Social Care (8 Aug 2021 - 8 Feb 2022)**



**4.1 Children and Families support by Targeted Early Help & Family Support (As at February 2022)**



**4.2 CSC has experienced a significant increase in demand during 2021, in both volume and complexity.**

Since March 2021, we have seen an increase in MASH contacts and if current demand continues at the same rate, we are forecast to receive 1,500 more referrals and subsequent social work assessments over the last 12 months, representing a 40% increase in demand. Subsequently, we also have more Child Protection (CP) enquiries and children subject to CP plans and to a lesser extent there is also a rise in court proceedings and children coming into care.

- 4.3 Caseloads in safeguarding teams have consequently risen above our guide no.15, which has been impacting on the positive trajectory of practice and performance. In response, an additional investment of £1m is enabling Children’s Social Care to increase the staffing establishment, to manage this additional demand.

## 5. Progress on the improvements

- 5.1 The table below summarises the recommendations from the focussed visit by Ofsted in July 2021 in the first column, the second column outlines the actions delivered to date

<b>Ofsted Focussed Visit July 2021 Recommendations</b>	<b>What have we done so far</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The quality of children’s plans, pathway plans, and review letters to children, to include child-friendly language</li> <li>• Placement sufficiency, to ensure the range and choice of suitable homes for children</li> <li>• Consultation and notification to host authorities of children placed at a distance</li> <li>• Case recording of visits, supervision, and rationale for decision-making and the matching of placements</li> <li>• The timeliness of initial health assessments and personal education plan meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have developed a new format for care plans which is now on LCS</li> <li>• New Practice Guidance - Chronologies/Case Summary/Recording Home Visits/Care Plans</li> <li>• Supervision forms redesigned to ensure tasks are followed through and supervision policy refreshed so children are discussed at least once every month</li> <li>• Bespoke service training through Practice Standards, including a more child centred approach</li> <li>• Refreshed Sufficiency Strategy with dedicated improvement programme, additional capacity &amp; and oversight board chaired by the DCS, supported by four delivery groups</li> <li>• Increased capacity in the Commissioning and Placements team to undertake monitoring visits and set up local meetings with providers to improve relationships.</li> <li>• Unregulated placement panel has been introduced chaired by Director of Children’s Social Care</li> <li>• DfE bid to open a new 2 bedded residential unit in Lewisham, together with accommodation for 16/17 year olds and care leavers (internal business case agreed)</li> <li>• Redevelopment of LCS episode for placements using the Islington model – This has involved a redesign of the placement</li> </ul>

	<p>referral form which will improve evidence of placement matching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where children are placed at a distance, consultation with host Authorities where there are complex needs now routinely taking place</li> <li>• Re-drafted policy for 24-Emergency Placements with Connected Persons and the Assessment of Potential Connected Carers Increased performance management monitoring re: PEP's, IHA's</li> <li>• Following agreement with NHS colleagues streamlined consent process agreed as part of IHA referral process</li> <li>• In partnership with the Police new Missing Procedures launched in July 2021 with tighter time scales for Missing - Strategy Meeting and centralised recording process</li> </ul>
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## 5.2 Development of new services and strategies within CSC:

There have been a number of developments over the last year, including the following:

- Family Thrive Service - Providing **targeted support intervention** within the Early Help model in Lewisham
- Early Help and Prevention Strategic Plan 2020-2023
- A new Child Exploitation Strategy
- A refresh of the Meliot Centre, with further investment to support families and children who might otherwise enter care
- A Domestic Abuse strategy and a domestic abuse hub within Children's Social Care
- Further work to embed our social care practice model - Signs of Safety - to improve the overall quality of our learning and development offer
- Continued focus on workforce development and implementing the Lewisham CSC Workforce Strategy with the support of our Partners in Practice arrangement with Islington
- A new Corporate Parenting Strategy

## 6. Ofsted Annual engagement meeting

- 6.1 The annual engagement meeting with Ofsted took place in November 2022 and the subsequent letter was shared with Members of the Committee earlier this year. The meeting was held virtually with two Ofsted HMIs and eleven members of the CSC Senior leadership team.
- 6.2 Inspectors gave feedback in recognition that the Children's social care has undergone a redesign with the creation of a new directorate 'Family, Quality and

Commissioning', the allocation of YOS from Adults to Children's Services, the establishment of Early Help and Prevention board, and the Domestic Abuse Strategic Board.

- 6.3 They reported that adjustments and flexibilities put in place to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 were effective. This included assessments of children and prioritising those at risk, services put in place to support vulnerable families, distribution of resources and extra funding for foster carers, flexibility in working arrangement for staff, and ensuring that staff are engaged through various means of communication to boost morale and promote health and wellbeing.
- 6.4 They recognised the development of new initiatives within the Early Help Service and active recruitments to the service. There is however acknowledgment from senior officers that this is work in progress with more focus on timely assessments and intervention.
- 6.5 Inspectors noted the marked increase in demand both in volume and complexity over the past year, and that should this trend persist, it is projected that the number of contacts and demand for service would further increase significantly.
- 6.6 Inspectors acknowledged the success that has been achieved in ensuring that the number of children coming into care continues to fall, and now more comparable to other London Boroughs. They further noted that service leaders have a good understanding of the service, and have identified and put measures in place for improvement. For instance, increase in managerial capacity, increase participation of children in matters pertaining to their care, and ensuring that independent advocacy arrangements are reinforced.
- 6.7 They noted the good outcomes for Care Leavers with 55 entering employment or training and 27 having completed qualifications and/or commenced higher education despite the challenges of the pandemic. Though this accounts for 57% of Care Leavers in education, employment and training, it is progress towards our aspirational target of 70%.
- 6.8 Inspectors commended the continued bi-annual Listening and Learning practice weeks and our commitment to continuous improvement, evidenced in the increase of cases regarded as 'good' and a decrease in cases rated 'inadequate.' They further recognised the commitment in recruiting a permanent and stable workforce that includes an increasingly strong leadership team.

## **8. Financial Implications**

- 8.1 The overall funding for Children's Services has been set out in the budget recently agreed by Full Council.

## **9. Legal implications**

Not applicable

## **11. Equalities implications**

- 11.1 The Council's Comprehensive Equality Scheme for 2016-20 provides an overarching framework and focus for the Council's work on equalities and helps ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010.

## 12. Background Papers

The Ofsted report was published August 2019:

<https://files.api.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50101634>

## 13. Report Author and Contact

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## 14. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Lewisham Children's Social Care 2020/21 Annual Self-Assessment

## 15. Glossary

Term	Definition
ILACS	Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services. Details of the framework for inspection can be found here: <a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government</a>
CSC Children's Social Care.	The service area of Children's Services that provides statutory social work services to children in need, including those with complex disabilities, children in need of protection, children who are looked after (in care) and young people who her previously been in care.