**Appendix to letter to Children and Young People Select Committee 21 January 2020**

**We are writing from the SLH campaign to raise our concerns about the real and significant impact of this year’s budget cuts budget cuts to local authority funded services to children and young people and their families in Lewisham.**

We understand the unacceptable pressures and financial cuts imposed by the Government on the Council.

We note close to £1.5m proposed cuts from the Council with a direct or indirect impact on children.

**Our campaign opposes the £250,000 cut to Lewisham CAMHS Horizon Team**

**The council’s case for this cut to Lewisham CAMHS is based on:**

* increased expenditure in recent years from Lewisham CCG
* an unconfirmed anticipated increase in the CAMHS budget from the CCG for 2021-2022.
* a reduction in waiting times for **initial CAMHS assessments**
* anticipation that child mental health needs will be met through earlier wellbeing intervention from other local services ie CAMHS school teams, wellbeing practitioners and other waiting list interventions.

**In relation to this we would like to raise the following points:**

1. **Covid-19 and children’s mental health**

This decision does not take any account of **the impact of Covid 19 on children and families’ mental health.** It has been clearly documented that this will be massive and will significantly increase the number of children being referred to CAMHS.

Pressures have increased greatly: young people are no longer in school which can sometimes be a protective factor; many feel increasingly socially isolated; there are currently no sport or other protective leisure activities. Some young people are having to deal with their anxiety about vulnerable family members who are sick or even dying, especially children of keyworkers who are having to have to go to work in unsafe environments. Some children are scared to go to school lest they infect family members.

These factors will also bring **a new cohort of children and young people to CAMHS** who would not have previously needed mental health support.

We know that Covid 19 impacts most on our **already impoverished communities and on BAME families.**

1. **Funding services for CAMHS**The recent increase in CCG funding has been to address **the chronic underfunding of CAMHS service over many years** which has led to a huge backlog of work and long waiting lists, due to this severely inadequate funding. We know that there is still enormous need that is not being met.
2. **Internal CAMHS waiting lists for treatment are just as long as two years ago**

The CAMHS service has worked hard and creatively to address the length of waiting times for assessment. We know that the number of children on the waiting list and length of the wait for initial CAMHS assessments are much reduced and national targets are now being met.

Despite this, **the number of children waiting for specialist assessment and therapeutic intervention following these initial assessments is still far too high and the waiting time much too long. There are estimated to be around 200 children awaiting interventions and the wait can be up to one year.** Until this backlog is addressed then Horizon will not be able to meet the anticipated increase in need.

1. **Access to referrals to Horizon and other CAMHS services**

 **The threshold for a Horizon team referral is very high** and still only a small proportion of children meet the threshold for acceptance. **Many GPs report that many of their referrals are still declined and there are few alternative resources now available.**

The schools team and wellbeing practitioners offer high quality specific packages of intervention for specific conditions. Where there is complexity, dual diagnosis or a need for psychiatric review then they will be stepped up to the Horizon Team.

Specialist Teams like Neuro Development Team, Adolescent Resources and Therapy Service and Lewisham and Young People Service have very specific criteria for access to their services and limited capacity so all other referrals are held by the Horizon Team.

**The proposed £50 000 budget cut to the Children’s Health and Wellbeing Service will place an increased demand on local CAMHS services is also likely to increase the number of CAMHS referrals.**

**Further cuts with an impact on Children and Young People**

1. **Proposed decommissioning of the Mother and baby housing unit**

10 years of massive austerity cuts have impacted greatly on the poorest children in Lewisham. Supported housing provision for vulnerable young mothers and their babies has reduced from over 50 units in 2010 to the present 16. Closing this much needed housing service will increase the deprivation of young mothers and their babies and leave the majority of them living in unsupported and unsuitable hostel accommodation. The first 1000 days are the most vital in a childs life and for these very vulnerable babies the lack of support to their mothers will have a negative impact on their lives.

1. **Proposed £300 000 cuts to the sexual health budget -£150 000 from GP contract and £150 000 from SRH contract**

Lewisham has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in London and the highest rate of terminations of pregnancy and STI’s. Reducing the budget by such a significant amount will not address these ongoing issues or meet the needs of the boroughs most disadvantaged young people.

1. **Proposed reduction of £350 000 to the Health Visiting budget**

The covid pandemic has seen a significant increase in Sudden Infant deaths and non accidental injuries in young children in South East London. A skilled home visiting service is vital to address these issues and reverse this trend. Taking this money away from the 0-5 year population will have long term implications for many of them.

1. **Proposed cuts to early help services-£100 000 from Youth First, £50 000 from the Health and Wellbeing service and £20 000 from Children’s Centres**

Early help is vital in preventing long term adverse outcomes for children and young people. All of these services have a positive impact on childrens lives from birth to adulthood.

**What we ask:**

**The Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign calls on the Mayor and elected councillors in Lewisham to campaign with campaigns like ours, with other London boroughs, the LGA and with the national Labour Party to launch a campaign on the dangers to life, health and mental health from the impact of Government cuts to Local Authorities.**

**Such a campaign should demand that the Government adequately reimburse Local Authorities for the unprecedented massive expenditure imposed on them by the COVID pandemic so that cuts such as the ones proposed that will adversely affect the lives of children, young people and the most vulnerable in society do not take place.**

**Thank you**

**The Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign**