**Press statement from the Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign**

**For Thursday 21 January**Lewisham Council plans to cut £250,000 from Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) as part of a proposed package of close to £1.5m cuts with a direct or indirect impact on children.

The Save Lewisham Hospital is urging Lewisham Mayor Damien Egan and Council to defend the mental health and safety of children at the current time of COVID by not making the cut to CAMHS.

Pressures on CAMHS are increasing for many reasons: young people are spending many months out of school – which can sometimes provide a protective factor for those with mental health problems; many are feeling increasingly socially isolated when there are currently no sport or other leisure activities. In addition some young people are having to deal with anxiety about vulnerable family members who may be sick or even dying, especially children of key workers who are having to go to work in unsafe environments.

There are also increased pressures on families and young people due to family unemployment, poverty and inadequate finances, home schooling, increased cases of domestic violence and resulting parental mental health problems.

CAMHS services have historically been severely underfunded in Lewisham. Although measures to redress this have led to initial waiting times coming down, waiting times for actual therapy input are still long**.** Local GPs are finding it difficult to secure referrals to CAMHS and other support services due to their lack of capacity.

This can cause frustration and disappointment as parents arrive thinking their child is going to get a service but they only get an assessment and then are told there will be another long wait for any follow up treatment identified as necessary.

The Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign is urging the Council to understand the implications for children and young people before decisions are made and to ensure that the Council’s proposed cuts to CAMHS will not lead to worse waiting times.

Further cuts are proposed that also affect children and young people including cuts to health visiting services, closure of a housing unit for mothers and babies housing that offers supported accommodation to 16-22 year olds, cuts to school transport for disabled children.

.

Dr Tony O’Sullivan, retired paediatrician and former Director of Children’s Services at Lewisham and Greenwich Trust says

“We understand the unacceptable pressures and brutal financial cuts imposed by the Government on the Council over the last 10 years.

Contd.

We know that Lewisham Council says it needs to make £40 million in cuts over the next three years.

The impact on the local population and in this case the young and vulnerable is intolerable. We implore the Mayor and Cabinet to work with campaigners, the LGA other Councils, and with the national Labour Party, to launch an awareness campaign on the dangers to life and health from the impact of Government cuts to Local Authorities.”.

**The Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign**