

SAVE LEWISHAM HOSPITAL CAMPAIGN

CAMPAIGN AGAINST CUTS TO CAMHS BULLETIN NO 3

Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign's (SLHC) Response to the justification of Cabinet Member for Children & Young People, Councillor Barnham, for the hold back of £250,000 from Lewisham CAMHS, made at the Mayor & Cabinet Committee Meeting on Wednesday 3rd February. This decision will go to the full council meeting on 3rd March. Below we respond to the arguments made at the meeting.

We very clearly locate the responsibility for this disaster on the Tory government policies and budget cuts to local authorities. We appreciate the council's dilemma in being forced to reduce their budget. However, it is an absolute tragedy if we cannot protect the mental health and wellbeing of our most vulnerable children, especially those in our most deprived and black and ethnic minority families who are suffering the most from the consequences of this awful pandemic.

In response to pressure from some Councillors and the Campaign, a £250,000 contingency fund was proposed with the idea that it would be used when mental health need is identified.

Our view is that the need for an adequately resourced CAMHS service is already clearly identified as significant and that a much greater demand on the local CAMHS service is yet to come.

The Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign will continue to campaign about the physical and mental health needs of Lewisham children and young people. Do get in touch with us if you would like to be involved.

WHAT NEXT?

- Do please speak to write to your local councillor and MPs if you agree that this cut should not be made.
- We ask that the council and health services have a joint Lewisham-wide campaign advising children and young people and their families how to access mental health support.
- We again call on Lewisham's Mayor and elected councillors to campaign with us, with other London boroughs and 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. **The LGA has already called for the urgent reinstatement of the £1.7billion for early intervention that was taken from council budgets in 2010-11 and 2018-19**
- The campaign should demand that national Government adequately reimburse Local Authorities for the unprecedented massive expenditure imposed on them by the COVID pandemic so that proposed cuts adversely affecting the lives of children, young people and the most vulnerable in society do not take place.
- Sign our petition <https://www.change.org/p/damien-egan-reverse-the-cuts-to-young-people-s-nhs-m?ental-health-services-in-lewisham>
- See our website <https://www.savelewishamhospital.com/camhs-childrens-cuts-2021/> and Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/savelewishamhospitalnhs/>

We feel that more than anyone, the voice of a local mother will touch us all and remind us of the reality of what life is like for children and their families where the child is experiencing significant mental health issues and does not have access to the specialist support that they so desperately need. We thank her for her courageous contribution to our campaign.

'Don't tell me that CAMHS waiting times are satisfactory. My 13 year old daughter has been waiting for 8 months to be seen in Lewisham CAMHS. She has been barely able to get out of bed, not communicating, missing lots of school, self-harming and feeling like her life is not worth living. If this were due to a physical illness, she would rightly have had tests and treatment within weeks. But because it's a mental health problem it seems it's OK to leave her languishing on a waiting list for eight months without even an assessment or diagnosis? Whatever happened to parity of esteem between mental and physical health? My daughter has had early intervention through her school, but this service can't provide diagnosis and targeted treatment. But apparently my daughter's case is not enough of a crisis to get her prioritised for assessment in Lewisham CAMHS. My heart bleeds for all the other Lewisham families that must be stuck in the same boat as us. Don't tell distraught parents that CAMHS don't need the £250000 of council funding and that Early Intervention and Schools Mental Health Services can meet these needs'.

A Lewisham Parent

It is the greatest of ironies that bang in the middle of Child Mental Health Week and in the middle of the nightmare that is the Covid 19 pandemic that Lewisham's Mayor and Cabinet Committee meeting rejected the recommendation from the Children and Young Peoples Committee that the £250000 cut to Lewisham CAMHS should not be made. Every day this week on TV and newspapers we hear of the terrible cost of the pandemic and lockdowns on Child Mental Health.

Even before the pandemic there were grave concerns about the impact of successive government austerity policies on families and children's mental health with escalating numbers of children self-harming and developing serious eating disorders.

In August 2020, a survey found that British children had the worst unhappiness levels in Europe. We have to ask ourselves bigger questions about what our society is doing to our children's emotional wellbeing.¹

The Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign is aware of the very many challenges facing Lewisham's children and young people and their families and the erosion of services available to meet their needs.

Argument 1 That there has been a significant increase in CCG funding for Lewisham CAMHS and waiting times are much improved.

We say: It is correct that there has been an increase in the CCG funding of the CAMHS budget to address what Councillor Barnham himself acknowledges is many years of chronic underfunding for CAMHS services. Atrociously the government target is only to meet 35% of child mental health needs.

The years of underfunding have taken their toll with large number of children and young people having to wait unacceptably long times for assessment and treatment.

3 years ago, it was the Save Lewisham Hospital campaign arguing against proposed cuts to the CAMHS service that really highlighted the very longstanding and chronic underfunding of Lewisham CAMHS

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/aug/28/fear-of-failure-giving-uk-children-lowest-happiness-levels-in-europe>

compared to other comparable boroughs. These cuts had led to long and unacceptable delays for first assessments and appropriate treatments.

It has been really positive that this has been taken up by councillors and CCG funding has increased although it is still not as high as our neighbouring borough Southwark for example.

It is unfortunate that this much welcome and badly needed additional CCG funding is now being used as a rationale for cutting the planned £250000 council funding for next year.

The CAMHS service we know has used the increased funding to work hard and creatively to address the backlog of children waiting for first assessment and it is good to hear that the wait is not so long before children and young people are first seen. **But then they face the second waiting list for treatment – too often from months up to a year.**

THE WAITS ARE STILL FAR TOO LONG!

The Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign has been hearing from distressed parents about the impact of these still unacceptably long waits for their children to be seen. The longer the delay, the more established the difficulties can become and the greater the impact on the child's life and functioning.

We also hear that after the initial assessment there are still long delays for specialist assessments and treatments, so children and their families are disappointed and frustrated once again. There are estimated to be about 200 children still waiting for treatments after their initial assessments. **Councillor Tauseef Anwar** highlighted these issues in his speech to the Public Accounts Committee when he spoke out against the cuts to CAMHS.

Hospital admission now brings added risk due to the Covid 19 risk, so this has to be avoided at all costs, again putting additional pressure on overstretched CAMHS community services as high risk and very unwell young people are having to be prioritised and supported at home in the community wherever possible.

Argument 2: That there has been investment in mental health in schools teams which can help meet children's mental health needs.

We say: There has indeed been very welcome and much overdue increased central government funding for schools-based mental health clinicians. Inadequate still but better than before. This team has been getting excellent feedback for their work in Lewisham schools.

However, it is important to note that this service is only in SOME local schools. **The Mental Health in Schools Team (MHST) has clinicians in only 12 of Lewisham's 67 primary schools and 7 of 15 Lewisham Secondary schools.**

This is hardly going to identify and meet the needs of the majority of Lewisham school children, never mind those young people over 16 and not in education or training.

School projects such as MHST teams often identify unmet need and could lead to an actual increase in referrals to CAMHS rather than less. **The MHSTs can only work with a certain level of risk and complexity before referring back to the Horizon CAMHS team where the cuts will fall.** Any child or young person needing medication will also need to be referred to Horizon to be seen by a child psychiatrist. This is a vital service to schools but should not be counter-posed as an appropriate alternative provision to CAMHS specialist care.

Argument 3: That Lewisham is prioritising and strengthening Early Intervention to identify problems early and to prevent children and young people's mental health deteriorating and needing a referral to CAMHS.

We say: It is fantastic that the need for good quality and that skilled Early Intervention is being recognised and is being invested in! Early Intervention is welcome and necessary. However, again, we do not think that this should be counterposed to meeting the needs of the most unwell, distressed and disturbed young people who have been waiting for treatment or whose needs are not currently being identified due to their isolation under lockdown.

We think in this exceptional situation of a pandemic there needs to be funding of both Early Intervention to prevent less serious problems getting worse and specialist intervention for those children and young people with complex needs.

Without these specialist interventions we can have false economies, as children end up being admitted to hospital or in care as their families can no longer cope.

Argument 4: That the referral rates to CAMHS are stable.

We say: We challenge the assumption that stable referrals indicate stable rather than unidentified mental health need.

We know that schools and GPs are the most common referrers and during the pandemic it has been harder to access GP appointments. We hear from our local GPs that **many have stopped referring** due to the frequent rejections of their referrals. If thresholds have changed and less referrals are now being rejected by CAMHS then this needs to be widely publicised.

Many children are currently not in school where their needs can be picked up and addressed. Alarming, but unsurprisingly given all the other current pressures on school staff, a Young Minds survey found that **only 27% of children had a one-to-one conversation with a teacher or another member of staff in which they had been asked about their emotional wellbeing.**

We hear that people are terrified to attend A&E due to fear of Covid 19 infection, so it is not safe to assume that reduced attendance indicates less need. On the contrary it is of great concern as it was reported that in survey of 1369 psychiatrists that 43% of those surveyed had seen an increase in urgent and emergency caseloads where patients were showing the most serious conditions.

What about our young people between the ages of 16-18 who are not in education or training? Aside from their parents, who else will be picking up on their needs?

In his presentations to the Children & Young People's and Public Accounts Select Committees, **Councillor Luke Sorba** extensively detailed the significant and indisputable evidence from recent research that children's mental health is significantly deteriorating. To quote a warning from the Royal College of Psychiatry's Professor Wendy Burns, psychiatrists fear lockdown is **'storing up a 'tsunami' of mental health problems'**.² 'We are just as worried about the people who need help now but aren't getting it'. She cited research by the Royal Society for public health which found that young people are more likely to experience poor mental health and wellbeing under lockdown than older adults.

² <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/coronavirus-lockdown-mental-health-impact-royal-college-psychiatrists-a9517331.html>

The Princes' Trust annual survey of the happiness and wellbeing of young people 16-24 gave the worst findings in its 12-year history. **One in 4 felt unable to cope with life in the pandemic and are in danger of giving up on their futures and on themselves.** More than half said they always or often felt anxious – this rose to 64% not in work education or training.³

Young Minds' third survey of children and young people's mental health reported in autumn 2020 when students returned to schools.⁴ This study found that **69% of respondents described their mental health as poor now that they were back at school**; this had risen from 58% who described their mental health as poor before returning to school. This new lockdown is expected to continue for some time, and we can anticipate a further deleterious effect. **80% of respondents agreed that the coronavirus pandemic had made their mental health worse. 41% said it had made their mental health 'much worse', up from 32% in the previous survey.**

The report concluded that it is clear that the pandemic has put a huge strain on many young people who were already struggling with their mental health, because of **traumatic experiences, social isolation, a loss of routine and a breakdown of formal and informal support.**

Channel 4 news reported this week that **there had been a 42% rise in the number of referrals to CAMHS** at the Maudsley Hospital.⁵

Impact of wider cuts on children and young people in Lewisham

It is not only cuts to CAMHS that are having an effect on children and young people's mental health in Lewisham. The broader swathe of cuts, the result of government cuts and denial of funding to local authorities, have destroyed the fabric of support in the community.

A community nurse states:

'Lewisham is such a great borough to live and work in. But 10 years of austerity, cuts to adult services, housing, leisure and children's health and social care services have had a negative impact on the mental health of children and young people in our borough.'

*One in three Lewisham children lives in poverty. Many of Lewisham's children suffer adverse childhood experiences such as domestic abuse, and parental substance misuse, and are at risk of exploitation by adult groomers and local criminal gangs. **A national reactive rather than a proactive child protection system** means that children are not identified and offered early help until a crisis point is reached.'*

THE NEED IS THERE AND MUST BE MET!

The Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign would like to extend our thanks to Councillor Luke Sorba and Councillor Tauseef Anwar who spoke so passionately and persuasively in opposition to the cuts to CAMHS. Also, thank you to all councillors on the Children and Young Peoples Committee who expressed their concerns and voted unanimously not to approve these cuts to Lewisham CAMHS.

³ www.princes-trust.org.uk The Princes Trust Tesco Youth Index 2021

⁴ www.youngminds.org.uk Coronavirus: Impact on Young People with Mental Health Needs

⁵ <https://www.channel4.com/news/the-true-impact-of-covid-on-childrens-mental-health>