**Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign  
Bulletin in response to the proposed budget cuts to CAMHS and children’s services***Extra points arising following the Children and Young People Committee on 21 January 2020*

**We are concerned about the impact of all the cuts proposed to children’s services.**However we are speaking in greater detail to the CAMHS cuts in particular, due to this decision having been deferred, and due to the particular impact of Covid 19 on children and young people’s mental health.

The Lewisham Children and Young Peoples’ Select Committee Thursday 21January heard from Pinaki Ghoshal, the authority’s Director for Children and Young People and elected councillors about their views and concerns about the proposed budget cut of £250,000 to Lewisham CAMHS, part of £1.45m cuts to vital children’s services. Dr Tony O’Sullivan (Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign) expressed deep concerns about these proposals.

Mr Ghoshal **said that these were a very** difficult set of proposals set in the context of central government reductions to local government finances and officers have tried to protect the most vulnerable children and young people. His view was that these proposed cuts were safe and deliverable whilst keeping a focus on the most vulnerable children in Lewisham.   
  
We understand the context of Conservative Government cuts to local authorities.  
  
**However we challenge these cuts and do not believe that they are safe or compatible with Lewisham’s stated values of giving children and young people the best start in life or delivering and defending health and social care.**

* It should be acknowledged that these proposals have been made before the current Covid lockdown and its anticipated longevity, so this has **not been risk assessed** in terms of the impact these cuts will have.
* Several councillors testified to the impact of Covid 19 lockdowns and restrictions on the emotional wellbeing of on their own children, children they work with or children they know.
* We are confident that everyone who reads this bulletin will know a child who is experiencing more anxiety and worry during this time. Thankfully many of these children have parents and carers with the economic and emotional resources to support them to learn at home, to not to go hungry and to reassure them about what is happening and reassure them that that things will eventually get better. **Others do not.**

**Our challenge in response to Council rationale for CAMHS budget cuts**

1. **It is misleading to claim that referrals of children not increasing equals need not increasing**

We heard from Mr Ghoshal that there has not been an increase in referrals to CAMHS during this or previous (last) lockdowns. But it is dangerous to imply that the mental health needs of children have not been affected by the coronavirus; this is a matter of very great concern rather than one for reassurance or complacency. On the contrary, It indicates that the mental health needs of too many Lewisham children and young people are not being identified or met. **One key reason is that families over the last period have had very limited access to GPs or school staff – two major sources of referrals into CAMHS.**

**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. [[1]](#footnote-1)

**Young Minds’** 3rd survey of children and young people’s mental health reported in autumn 2020 when students returned to schools.[[2]](#footnote-2) 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. Of course, with this new lockdown expected to continue for some time, 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.** This was often related to increased feelings of anxiety, isolation a loss of coping mechanisms or a loss of motivation.

Alarmingly, but unsurprisingly given all the other pressures on teachers, **only 27% had a one to one conversation with a teacher or another member of staff I which they had been asked about their emotional wellbeing.**

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 an informal support.

**A warning from Royal College of Psychiatry**

Professor Wendy Burn warned as early as last May that psychiatrists fear lockdown is **‘storing up a ‘tsunami’ of mental health problems’.** ‘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 heath which found that young people are more likely to experience poor mental health and wellbeing under lockdown than older adults. It was reported that a survey of 1369 psychiatrists in May 2020 found 45% had seen a reduction in routine appointments leading to fears that patients were avoiding support until they reached crisis point. **In addition, 43 % of psychiatrist had seen an increase in urgent and emergency caseload where patients were showing the most SERIOUS CONDITIONS. [[3]](#footnote-3)**

**At the Independent SAGE broadcast 22 January,** Professor Alan Stein presented on the impact of COVID-19 on children’s emotional wellbeing and how this needs to be addressed.

We also think it is vital to acknowledge the impact of 11 years of austerity governments and further austerity cuts predicted until at least May 2024.

The evidence of the impact of coronavirus is clear and it will continue. And we must remember that COVID-19 disproportionally affects those most at risk in our community including our black and minority ethnic communities. We believe that the local authority must act to protect them.

1. **CAMHS waiting lists and national targets**

It is important to remember that the national target is to meet 35% of mental health needs so the discussion takes place in this context. Lewisham CAMHS has had additional investment from the CCG which has enabled the waiting list for CAMHS assessments to be targeted. There were no figures available for CCG funding this year. Lewisham CAMHS management and staff have worked exceptionally hard to enable this to be successful.

However the impact of long term chronic underfunding of the service and prioritising the waiting list for initial assessment has meant that **there has been an increasing wait for further specialist intervention and therapeutic intervention.** We have not been able to gain access to statistics about the extent of these waits however we have reports of approximately 200 children waiting with some waiting up to a year.

1. **It is unproven and unreliable – that increased investment in Early Intervention and preventative work will reduce the need for CAMHS level interventions.**

It is really positive to hear that there will be increased local authority investment in IThrive and continued investment in Kooth online support. Lewisham CAMHS have also worked hard to improve access to support through group work for a variety of conditions.

However, as documented above we are really concerned that children’s needs are not being identified early for a variety of reasons and on the basis of the above surveys **there will be significant numbers of Lewisham children whose mental health needs will be significant and who need access to the highly skilled therapeutic interventions available in CAMHS**. This includes children who will have experienced the traumatic bereavement of loved ones due to COVID 19. Group work can certainly meet some needs, however many other children and their families will required individual packages of therapeutic interventions.   
  
We are also concerned that this year’s budget reductions to Health Visiting Youth First, Health & Wellbeing Service and Children’s Centres will also impact on the detection and early referral of children with mental ill health to CAMHS and will reduce the support available to their families.

**Councillors say that this budget cut could be a false saving – we agree**

Without adequate support we are likely to see higher levels of children experiencing significant harm, family breakdown and children needing to be looked after, substance misuse and youth crime.

**Conclusion  
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.**

**The Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign**

1. [www.princes-trust.org.uk](http://www.princes-trust.org.uk) The Princes Trust Tesco Youth Index 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk) Coronavirus: Impact on Young People with Mental Health Needs [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/coronavirus-lockdown-mental-health-impact-royal-college-psychiatrists-a9517331.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)