

**REPORT OF THE  
INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT  
OF CHILD CARE  
IN THE  
LONDON BOROUGH OF ISLINGTON**

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**AND**

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***A REPORT COMMISSIONED BY ISLINGTON COUNCIL FOLLOWING SERIOUS  
ALLEGATIONS ABOUT CHILD CARE PRACTICES IN THE BOROUGH***

**MAY 1995**

**The Reference in this Report to any other documents does not imply any waiver of privilege or waiver of public interest immunity.**

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He was awarded a CBE in the 1995 New Year's Honours List, was President of the Association of Directors of Social Services during 1991/92, chairs one of the Association's main policy committees and has been a member of the Executive Council for 8 years.

He has been a member of the Lord Chancellor's Children Act Advisory Committee since its inception, has carried out consultancy and advisory work for a number of Government and non-Governmental agencies, has contributed to many conferences and working groups on child care policy, including the Utting Review of Residential Child Care, and the Howe Inquiry into Residential Child Care Policy.

His qualifications include a Masters Degree in Public Policy, he is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Secretaries and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

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Kate Hart works for Oxfordshire County Council as Principal Officer, Service Development and Practice Standards, previously managed children's child protection inspections and has been a member of the Area Child Protection Committee system.

Kate Hart has worked in Social Services for over twenty years, and prior to joining Oxfordshire in 1988, was a manager of children's services in Hampshire. She gained her CQSW in 1975 and Masters degree in 1994.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We wish to thank all the Councillors and staff of Islington Council for their open and wholehearted approach to our work. In particular we would wish to acknowledge the amount of work that the Personnel team assisted us in during their busy day.

We also wish to thank the Metropolitan Police (Islington) for their help, New Scotland Yard and the Department of Health for their advice and background briefings which help set the work into context.

We would wish to thank staff in East Sussex Social Services Department and East Sussex Police, and the many individuals who saw us privately and wrote to us.

Our thanks also go to Messrs Cassam and McAndrew with whom we were able to cross-check information.

We would also like to give special thanks to [REDACTED] our administration support assistant, who worked tirelessly on the organisation, administration and report production.

Finally, our thanks go to Oxfordshire County Council for their preparedness to release the time for this work to be carried out.

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE CONDUCT OF THE ENQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF CHILD CARE IN ISLINGTON**

1. ***Allegations of Staff Misconduct and Inappropriate Treatment of Children and Young People***
  - 1.1 The Inquiry team should initially identify and list all allegations of misconduct by staff employed (currently or formerly) by the London Borough of Islington and of inappropriate treatment, including neglect and abuse, of children accommodated by the Borough, including specific allegations by the London Evening Standard Newspaper in November 1992 and December 1993.
  - 1.2 The Inquiry team should check this list against the Reports to the Council provided by Mr McAndrew and Ms Tunnard dated February 1993, by Mr Cassam and Mr McAndrew dated July 1993, by Mr McAndrew dated February 1994 and finally by Mr Cassam and Mr McAndrew dated March 1994 and identify those allegations, the handling of which has yet to be fully and independently reviewed.
  - 1.3 Where it is considered that allegations have been fully and independently reviewed, a synopsis of action taken as a result should be prepared.
2. ***Review of Allegations***
  - 2.1 The Inquiry team should collate information in respect of each allegation and prepare a clear chronology of events.
  - 2.2 In respect of each allegation the Inquiry team should comment and advise on each of the following aspects:-
    - i. Whether information indicates the possibility of criminal activity - if it does, the Inquiry must convey the information to the Police without delay.
    - ii. Whether the information indicates the need for any staff disciplinary measures.
    - iii. Whether the information indicates that measures are needed to protect children, or whether there should be specific reviews by the Area Child Protection Committee (under the guidance published by the Department of Health in "Working Together" under the Children Act 1989).
    - iv. Whether there are legitimate complaints by, or on behalf of, children's services users that remain to be resolved under the Council's complaints procedure (established under Section 26(3) of the Children Act 1989).
    - v. Whether the information indicates that staff grievance procedures should be invoked.

### 3. *Missing Files*

The Inquiry team should review the investigation undertaken for the Borough by Mr McAndrew (and completed in February 1994). To the extent that it has not been done by Mr McAndrew or to the extent they consider it appropriate to do this, the Inquiry team should:-

Enquire into the disappearance of relevant files in the period being enquired into, including to seek and interview persons who might be able to shed light on their disappearance. To comment and advise on the explanations, if any, for their disappearance and the possible culpability of any staff members concerned and to advise on appropriate management and/or disciplinary action.

### 4. *General*

- 4.1 The Inquiry Team should make general comments on the implications of the Inquiry for the state of practice in the Council's Social Services child care provision, cross-referencing to anything recommended in Mr Cassam's and Mr McAndrew's July 1993 report, as necessary.
- 4.2 The Inquiry should report to the Council by end December 1994.
- 4.3 The Council should provide the Department of Health with a copy of the report.
- 4.4 The report should be made public without undue delay.

The allegations made by the Evening Standard and referred to in paragraph 1.1 above have also been delivered to Scotland Yard.

October 1994

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Background**

In October 1992, the Evening Standard published articles in which serious allegations were made about the care of children who were the responsibility of the London Borough of Islington. The Evening Standard reports asserted that children in care were working as prostitutes and using Children's Homes to entertain customers, that children were seduced into drugs, homosexuality and prostitution, that some children were sexually abused, gang raped, knifed and that fears of an organised child sex ring were dismissed by management and not properly investigated. The Evening Standard alleged that Children's Homes had been out of control at times with lapses in security and discipline as a result of low staff levels and poor management.

As a reaction to these allegations and other serious issues during the period, London Borough of Islington commissioned or received no less than 13 different Inquiry reports and inspections before this final review. Such an incremental response to allegations as serious as this were not considered to be sufficient by Islington and as a consequence, this report was commissioned with the aim to pull all this work together, to explore previously unpublished dossier information provided by the Evening Standard, and to produce a final overview picture to these various and serious allegations.

This Inquiry has therefore analysed all these previous pieces of work, used the Evening Standard data, interviewed considerable numbers of staff and Councillors and has come to the conclusions contained in the report.

In carrying out this review, it became very apparent that to understand the issues presented, it was necessary to understand the history, context and culture of Islington at the time. From 1982 Islington had a series of Labour Councils with a clear political objective of establishing a decentralisation policy based on Neighbourhood offices. The implementation of that policy which in effect broke up the traditional functional organisation of the Borough, combined with much changed personnel and equal opportunities policies, began to create an environment where the morale, management competencies and professional standards of the department declined. These problems were exacerbated by financial considerations, the way the departmental organisation changes were imposed, the appointment of middle managers who were not qualified to manage social services practices, the poor quality of residential care management, the aftermath of industrial action and working relationships with other agencies which were not as good as they should have been. In our view, this created the conditions where poor practice and negligent management action could flourish. We are not therefore surprised that issues such as those raised by the Evening Standard and the subsequent Inquiries should have been found in a Borough like Islington.

The responsibility for ensuring the provision of a properly accountable and robust department lies with the Council of the time and its Senior Officers. It is our view that the weaknesses in the organisation indicated an amazing breakdown in communications and credibility which undoubtedly created the conditions in which the bad practice and other matters contained in this report were allowed to flourish.

**There is no doubt in our mind that a "pure" Neighbourhood structure is fundamentally unable to provide the expertise, consistency, checks and balances and professional standards required of a competent Social Services function.**

### **Allegations of Staff Misconduct and Inappropriate Treatment of Children and Young People**

#### **Personnel**

The full terms of reference are set out at the beginning of this report. Our response has been to analyse all the dossiers and other information presented to us and to check lists of names of staff against Islington's personnel records. Details of the names of these staff are contained in confidential annexes to this report. This comprehensive review listed allegations against 32 named staff involving sexual assaults on other staff, encouraging boys to be rent boys, sexual misconduct with residents, sale of drugs, poor child care, staff involvement in paedophile rings and child pornography and many other serious allegations. Of the total of 32 staff:-

- \* 4 were subject to disciplinary action, following which 2 were dismissed
- \* 5 were subject to disciplinary process but left on ill health grounds before disciplinary action was concluded.
- \* 1 faced charges of child abuse
- \* 13 were not subject to any investigation
- \* 10 resigned
- \* 1 was dismissed
- \* 2 are still in post (only 1 in child care)
- \* 3 were from agencies

Many of these allegations involved criminal behaviour as well as staff misconduct and the standard response of any Social Services Department then and now should have been as follows:-

- \* Suspension of staff implicated and a full disciplinary investigation with a concluding investigative disciplinary hearing.
- \* A review of the particular child's case on a multi-disciplinary basis supervised by ACPC.
- \* A joint Police and Social Services investigation in those circumstances where it appears there might be criminal behaviour.

The responsibility for ensuring that such an investigative system was in place rested with the Council and Senior Officers of Islington during the period in question. It is clear that Islington did not initiate the type of investigation they should have and as a consequence the possibility remains that staff engaged in abusive behaviour are now working elsewhere in the field with potentially serious consequences. Islington should have known and acted; they clearly did not.



## **Equal Opportunities**

We have been told that the equal opportunities policy in action at that time created a "back door" where staff could very well have been allowed to act unprofessionally and to exit Islington as questions began to be asked. We were told that at the time, there was "an equal opportunities environment driven by a personnel perspective which became a positive disincentive to challenge bad practice. We were told it was a weak ineffective organisation which was set up for individuals to feed off for their own advantage; it was paralysed by equal opportunity and race issues."

It is clearly crucial that all the policies and practices of a Local Authority in relation to children are primarily child centred, rather than personnel centred only, and whilst equal opportunities policies are very important, they cannot be allowed to be implemented in such a way as to have positive disadvantages of the kind outlined.

## **Organisational Competence**

We were told of a demoralised management system, unsupported and with fragmented leadership which in parts were staffed by people not from a Social Services background and therefore who would not know what to look for and how to respond to the management of child care issues. Clearly, such an organisation becomes a recipe for disaster.

## **Agency Staff**

Some of the information presented to us reflected the use of agency staff which all Authorities use. It is alleged that at least one staffing agency in Islington was run by paedophiles and heavily used by Children's Homes and therefore a natural conduit for paedophiles to infiltrate the system. The Warner Report and subsequent guidance issued by the Government in 1992/93 clearly states how Local Authorities should be working with agency staff and clearly the Warner Report post-dated these allegations. The Islington Inquiry, however, does raise questions of general importance about the extent of action on this and we will write to the Department of Health raising these so that they can take them up nationally.

## **Islington Staff**

Islington notified the consultancy register at the Department of Health on very few occasions and it is arguable that most, if not all of the names in the confidential annexes, should have been notified to Department of Health. Only one member of staff identified is currently working in child care services:

## **Recommendation**

We recommend the Authority should review their employment of this remaining member of staff in the light of not only his recent employment record, but in the light of the contents of this report, matters contained in the dossiers and summarised in the confidential annexes in relation to this member of staff should be thoroughly reviewed with line managers where they can still be found to ascertain whether it is safe for him to continue working in child care

### **Recommendation**

**We recommend that Islington write to all Social Services Departments suggesting they review current employees who may have come via the Islington route are to be checked with Islington Council and the Department of Health Consultancy Register.**

### **Information about Potential Paedophiles**

**It is clear that only a very small number of paedophiles ever get convicted and that therefore Local Authorities will not pick up their names from either the consultancy register or from police checks. Whilst we recognise that this is a difficult legal area, and one which involves policy being made by the Home Office, Department of Health and others, we do feel that it is important that a review of how information can be exchanged is carried out if all Local Authorities are not to find staff having left one Authority now working in their own and we will write to the Department of Health accordingly.**

**We were asked in the Terms of Reference to ensure that information collated in this Inquiry is passed to the Police. All the confidential information contained in the annex has not only been passed to the Police and checked with them, but with the Department of Health consultancy register too. We believe that the information presented in the annexes, together with our general commentary fulfils the Terms of Reference in relation to all matters concerning staff.**

**The personnel implications of this report are profound and may have far reaching consequences. Islington's response at the time was far from satisfactory and this report feels like "closing the door when the horse has long bolted".**

### **Issues Concerning Children**

**The Terms of Reference 2.2 (iii/iv) draw attention to information about children. As with the personnel, we have analysed all the allegations about named children and have passed them onto Islington Social Services. A detailed analysis, which is based on cross-checking all the names presented with all the other Inquiry report, is contained in the confidential annexes setting out the allegations made against individual children and cross-referred to staff records.**

**The allegations about children range from allegations about disturbingly low standards of care in Children's Homes, to incompetent line management of Children's Homes and to the investigation of organised sex rings and network abuse. Twenty-five children were identified specifically. The conclusions that we and others have drawn are that:-**

- \* The state of some Children's Homes at the time was very poor indeed.**
- \* There had been lack of investment in those Children's Homes.**
- \* That line management standards throughout the complete period were very poor, often with middle managers with responsibility for children's centres not carrying out those responsibilities professionally or knowledgeably.**

Some of the allegations involved the response Islington made to allegations of organised abuse. These were checked out and investigated fully with the Metropolitan Police, Social Services Inspectorate and others and we found that with the exception of one conviction in relation to a staff member at a residential school, Islington did investigate these allegations and we found no evidence to support assertions of organised abuse.

### **Individual Children**

All the individual children's cases have been brought to the attention of Islington and have been checked up to the current position. With the exception of children where there have been independent reviews, all the other children's names have been reviewed by Islington who have reported on their current whereabouts, needs for support and help. The Authority has provided comprehensive information about its involvement with these young people. Ten children, now young adults, have all very different histories, but from the enquiries we have made it is appropriate to conclude that Islington were aware of all of them, have maintained contact where possible and where wanted and have provided or offered ongoing support and help appropriate to their individual needs and circumstances.

### **Voluntary Child Care Organisations**

The Evening Standard dossier reflects concern that one particular voluntary child care organisation who provided volunteer advocates to visit Children's Homes had been infiltrated by paedophiles. If this was true, it is extremely important and illustrates the ease by which people wishing to prey on young people can get access to them. We have discussed this problem with Department of Health who have drawn our attention to the relevant circulars defining how voluntary child care organisations should embark on police and consultancy checks but we are still concerned that there might not be a consistent approach nationally to this.

**We therefore recommend:-**

**That all Social Services Departments review their use of such voluntary organisations and agencies and discuss with those organisations how they recruit, supervise and monitor the quality of work of their staff. We urge all Local Authorities to establish a simple "contracting system" which would include a specification of requirements, and a process of organisational audit. This might involve, for example, one Authority in the country in whose area the headquarters of such organisation exist, agreeing with that organisation to be lead in checking the organisations' professional practices. We are sure that all such organisations will see this as valuable confirmation of their organisational strength and not as something onerous and to be rejected.**

**We do not believe that there is anything further constructive that Islington could now do to rectify any of the inadequacies of services during the period in question.**

## **Missing Files**

We were asked to review the previous investigations undertaken on this subject and where possible to enquire into the disappearance of relevant files. The allegations specifically refer to files in relation to 3 children and a number of other general issues. We have cross-checked all the Evening Standard dossiers with Mr McAndrew's work and with work carried out by Peter Smith in a report of March 1992 and present the details of this.

In respect of Child A, we found no evidence of collusion or deliberate attempts to withhold information. We do, however, conclude that there is much evidence of confusion and poor management of written records at the time.

In relation to Child B, there were allegations that East Sussex Police and East Sussex Social Services had been deliberately prevented from accessing file material in relation to very serious allegations involving a suspected paedophile. Our view is that Islington did not deliberately withhold such key information although we believe that the way communications were carried out between the various agencies concerned was very poor, strung out over a long period of time and handled badly at the Islington end.

In relation to Child C, it is alleged that key materials went missing. We know that the Social Worker concerned went missing at the same time and we can find no evidence that the disappearance of this worker and his file were in any sense part of a wider conspiracy. In such a situation we would expect that Islington would have undertaken a proactive series of enquiries as soon as possible and that whilst they did advise the New Zealand Social Work Department of their concerns, we believe that they should have involved the Police of both countries from the outset.

A number of other allegations are detailed in the main body of the report which we have cross-checked and investigated as much as we can. There is no evidence to support the allegations of collusion but there is sufficient evidence to support the assertion that missing files were a feature of poor administrative systems.

Administrative systems have been a recurrent theme in relation to all of these concerns throughout the many previous Inquiries.

## **Recommendation**

We recommend that London Borough of Islington, as part of their new administrative arrangements, urgently review the arrangements for client files to make sure that a consistent approach is adopted and introduced across the Council as soon as possible.

## **General Implications of the Inquiries for the State of Child Care Practice**

The Inquiry team were asked to make general comments on the implications of the Inquiry for the state of practice in child care provision. We have presented in this report a full chapter summarising previous Inquiries and independent reports over a long period of time. It is clear from reading this chapter that as they unfold there are a series of issues which consistently run as a thread through them and indicate bad and deficient practice at the time. In summary, the key themes emerged were:-

- \* Issues about delay.
- \* Practice where there was an absence of thorough consideration of facts, information, history and planning.
- \* An inadequate level of administrative support.
- \* Poor supervision of staff.
- \* Unavailability of expertise for complex cases.
- \* A lack of up-to-date training in child protection.
- \* Poor standards of case records.
- \* An absence of management monitoring and reviewing in critical case decision making.
- \* The confusion of roles between staff between the department and a consequential confusion of accountability.
- \* A lack of systems for monitoring the department's work, quality standards and implementation.

Islington did not respond as quickly and as comprehensively as it should to these various reports and there are still a number of areas not completely and satisfactorily covered which we believe should be addressed quickly.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend that Islington undertake an audit of its supervision policy and practice to review the extent to which supervision systems are working effectively.

#### **Recommendation**

We recommend that Islington undertakes a training needs analysis and a review of training priorities against the department's training plan for 1995/96.

#### **Recommendation**

We understand that a new recording system has recently been introduced and that new file structures have been implemented. We recommend that Islington undertake an audit of the implementation of these new policies in the Autumn of 1995.

We know that progress has been made and our report sets out the position today. We know that changes have been made to address to the different issues raised in this report. We argue that as the new management system settles down, it needs to be supported by a programme of organisation and management development and we hope that Islington will support this. We are unsure that all the lessons of the previous reviews and Inquiries have been incorporated into professional practice in Islington, although we know that Islington has made considerable strides in this respect.

### Recommendation

We therefore recommend Islington urgently review whether the arrangements now put in place for professional audit and other matters will be sufficient to see the Department over the next two years and if not to make further time available through this crucial phase.

We know that further personnel management changes have been made in Islington and that some of the problems of personnel management set out earlier in this report could still happen if personnel arrangements are not consistent and efficient.

### Recommendation

We recommend Islington to review and strengthen the management of the personnel system to ensure overall control and quality checks are robust enough to meet child centred management requirements.

We have drawn attention in the report to the need for all personnel policies, including equal opportunities to be child focused and we know that there are still questions in the minds of some senior staff about whether or not the equal opportunities policy has been synchronised enough with child care needs.

### Recommendation

We recommend that Islington Council formally review the equal opportunities policy in relation to its application to child care in order to remove, once and for all, any possible problems that this policy could create in addressing competency and management issues in Islington.

### Conclusion

This Inquiry has sought to bring together all the previous work, and has charted an organisation in the late 1980's and early 1990's that was for many different reasons chaotic. Such a chaotic organisation breeds the conditions for dangerous and negligent professional practices in relation to child care and the possibility that many of the allegations made were true remains. What is sad is that Islington did not systematically investigate them as they should have and as a result, the possibility remains that children have been abused and that abusers are still working in the field elsewhere.

We nevertheless now know that many changes have been made within Islington to bring the child care function back to "centre stage" with a new Chief Social Services Officer and Head of Neighbourhood Services with newly established child care management arrangements and new managers too. We very much hope that this report ends what must be a disastrous chapter in Islington's history.