INDEPENDENT MANAGEMENT REVIEW INTO ASPECTS OF CHILD CARE IN ISLINGTON

Brian A. Mc Andrew

Progress Report December 1993

The Brief

Amongst the allegations made in the Evening Standard were that files required to research investigations into allegations of child abuse went missing and were only produced under pressure of bad publicity.

The setting of the allegations was that the outside agencies investigating allegations of child abuse did not receive the co-operation they might reasonable expect

During phases 1 and 2 of the review queries were raised as to whether files had been tampered with since important documents appeared to be missing.

There was not time under stage 2 to investigate these claims. I was asked to carry out a review of these specific allegations prior to the detail of phase 3 of the review being determined.

The Timetable

The time table was to produce an interim report by Christmas and a final report in mid January. This will not now be possible because interviews with the agencies and former employees have taken a long time to arrange and all required visits to their premises. Interviews with employees and

former employees were extended since they wished to raise issues beyond the missing files issue. If this information is acted on it will be included in phase 3.

A complication of this study and for stage 3 is that very few people who were involved in these areas are still employed by Islington.

This progress report is produced for the Chief Executive in lieu of an interim report. It is too early to draw definitive conclusions and any tentative conclusions have yet to be tested with the relevant managers. The first draft report will be produced after a further eight interviews have been held and the final report will be produced a few days after the response from Islington's managers.

Work to date

I have:

Re read the statements made in phases 1 and 2 which might be relevant and noted any significant comments.
Read and annoted the three files.

Read a residential file on

Read an 88 page report by Jo Moad as an Independent Investigator into complaints about the care of

Read a 25 page report by Eva Learner as the Independent Person under the Children Act regarding complaints about the care of

Interviewed two senior mangers

Interviewed six staff from agencies who contacted Islington about child abuse enquiries

Interviewed an existing member of staff

Interviewed three former members of staff

Still to do

See to do list on Page 9

THOUGHTS ARISING FROM THE WORK TO DATE

General

This part of the review was concerned with the circumstances surrounding the allegations made by and the subsequent investigations. Since then reports have been produced on complaints by which also involve missing files. These latest reports do not justify further detailed enquiries but they do provide additional insights into missing files.

Possible reasons for files being missing

There are four possible explanations as to why files or parts of files went missing.

- Managerial or administrative incompetence whereby file keeping was no ones particular responsibility and concern and therefor things went missing due to carelessness.

- Malice whereby things went missing because people ensured that relevant material was hidden for fear it would incriminate themselves, their friends or the department.

- Miscommunication whereby things were not truly missing but because different levels of management and workers failed to talk and explain incorrect assumptions were made.

- Any combination of the above.

Possible explanations of allegations of non co-operation

As to inferences that Islington officers were unhelpful this could be :

- Untrue and a misunderstanding by the other agencies, the press or both.

- That the press and or officers of other agencies misinterpreted the reasonable caution of Islington officers in protecting the legitimate interests of children, employees and the authority.

- The information systems were so poor as to be incredible and that led to speculation that information was being withheld.

- Officers meeting the agencies did not have direct knowledge of the subject and the relaying of information from other sources was a slow process giving rise to suspicion of non co-operation

- Officers were deliberately obstructive because they did not want to expose themselves or colleagues to a scrutiny which would reveal there inadequate practice

- Officers saw it as their duty to general defend the interests of the authority and that was best done by giving minimum co-operation.

- Any combination of the above

Missing files

I have yet to study the files in detail but it appears a critical file is missing. A missing log book was found by a residential worker prior to the court case. Further enquiry needs to be made of the then Manager to find out why (if true) it had been put in a box with personal effects sealed and staff told that its contents were highly confidential and not to seen by anyone.

Yet another missing file

An interview with a former member of staff reveals that there is yet another missing document. had, according to the witness, been formally told that he was not to have any further contact wit.

When was arrested he went through the filling system to find his personal log book containing the notes of his various supervisory sessions. He could not find the file. He did not attach particular significance to the event and I was the first person who he told. I am puzzled that no one thought it significant that there was no record of supervision. I will ask various managers if they can shed any light on this issue.

Co-operation with the Police

I will also ask why the Peter Smith enquiry was run so close to the court case thus denying the prosecution vital evidence until almost the day of the trial. It is not clear whether the Police were aware that this was the reason they got the files so late.

There was obvious frustration in the Metropolitan Police on the nature and quality of the co-operation they received whilst investigating the complaints made by . The person I spoke to contrasted this with the good experience they had in working with staff of the neighbourhood officers. There appears to have been some personal animosity between an important member of the police team and an important member of the Islington team. I have yet to confirm this in conversation with Islington managers.

The frustration of the police team led to a resolve that unless there was a considerable improvement the court would be asked to instruct Islington to produce the relevant documents and people. According to my witness the documents were produced before that was necessary.

The Police were working both with the neighbourhood officers and central officers and at that time there was no love lost between the two. This would not have helped with any spirit of co-operation. The police may have been caught up in the confusion of the structure and responsibilities which were addressed in the phase 2 report.

The Case

Files

I have read the three residential files on . and I need to resolve a range of issues arising. These are referred to in the questions still to be asked and given in the appendix to this report

Co-operation with East Sussex Police and Social Services

I have interviewed representatives of East Sussex Social Services and East Sussex Police. They were both disappointed with the co-peration they received from Islington. In my opinion it amounted to suspicion that co-operation was not forthcoming because there was something going on in Islington. The documentation was in their opinion poor. They found it hard to understand, for instance, why the files contain nothing on how the weekend visits came to be authorised and paid for. They were concerned as to how visits continued after the mother's letter and after they were forbidden.

There are a wide range of issues to take up with senior managers.

case

Reports by Jo Moad and Eva Learner

I have read the extensive reports produced by Jo Moad and Eva Learner and the following are extracts relating to files and record keeping.

In an addenda to Jo Moad's report she says "

> "On the 1st of November 1993 further records came to light at Grosvenor Avenue Children's Home."

On the missing file in discussion (page 26) she states

> "It is not possible to be definite about the time when information was provided about the missing file as evidence conflicts."

On page 28 comment is made that the files do not show repeated requests for case conference between 1991 and 1992 or any response to document sent to Islington ' life before Joining Our Family"

Page 29

> "----It took many hours of careful reading of the daily hand-written social work record to discover the relevant event information."

Recommendation 48 page 56

> a) That all the files relating t be retained in Calshot Neighbourhood Office so that they can be easily accessed in the future if required
>
> b) That all of the files are put into reliable chronological order. This will be a substantial piece of work and someone needs to be identified to carry it out and be given the necessary time to do it.

c) That a further effort is made to assemble documentation for the period covered by the missing file. Some of this can be obtained from Grosvenor Road and Mr and Mrs and Mr may also be available to help. I suggest that this material is assembled in one clearly marked file rather than added to the current file.

d) That The Social Worker prepares an up to date Social History and makes this available to Mr and Mrs

Appendix 6 (page 80)

"Files and records Consulted during the course of the Investigation"

"It will be seen from this list that the files are not complete"

"The absence of the file covering the period up to January 91 has been of major consequence during the course of the investigation. A brief explanation is provided under Representation 4. The period covered by the file is uncertain but it probably contains the entire social work record for 1990 and a substantial proportion of recording and correspondence relating to the autumn of 1989."

Eva Learner page 2

"----There were initially files numbering 1 to 6 of which one (or more) between 5 and 6 is missing when . left the Islington Department. The period covered by this file is unclear

providers. Apart from the direct benefit of such a style of management it might avoid the ill kept, scruffy, illegible and incomplete documentation that has featured in this and other cases

Upgrading Record Keeping

It is a worrying aspect of the review that highly relevant documents were found part way through an enquiry. Even more worrying is that a visiting consultant appears to have found in the archives a document that Islington staff failed to produce. This incident leaves a question as to whether a thorough search might reveal other missing documents. Another obvious question is whether the archive is a valued source of records and information or a dump used only occasionally in an emergency and for which no-one has ownership and accountability

Creating good record systems

A likely explanation for the lack of documentation on repeated requests for a case conference and for a response to the document ' life before entering care" of is that both were received and that the requests for a conference were neither granted nor documented but in the case of a response to the report none was recorded because none was made.

This sort of incident seriously detracts from the confidence that anyone might have in the content of the files.

The reference on page 29 of the time consuming nature of reading hand-written files is a polite expression of the sheer hard work in ploughing through some files which are badly constructed and in writing which is

barely legible. Such work deters all but the dedicated and is a direct detraction for anyone trying to understand the history of a particular case. The Social Worker's entries in the case were neat, clear and chronological. They provided a welcome relieve from a generally poor standard. It is not simple a matter of all that flows from people having difficult in understanding from the files what has happened. The general scruffiness, carelessness and illegibility give a poor, unprofessional and depressing impression of standards in general.

I would add to Eva Learner's good practice point on records that they also provide a history for any one who works with the young person, they provide a history for the young person and the provide a history for enquirers like me to show that proper procedures were followed and reasonable decisions were made. Jo Load makes a detailed recommendation concerning the value of records by stating that letters from a dead mother be specially protected because of their possible value to the son currently in care.

MISSING FILES ENQUIRY THINGS TO SO 17 DECEMBER 93

Get transcription machine and get all statements typed up.

Fix interview with I

Fix interview with review the files he is holding

Fix visit to Park Place family centre

Fix interview with

Fix interview with I

Fix interview with L

Fix interview with

Visit Archives

Fix further interview with member of staff and ex member of staff

Decide how to handle new allegation that a Neighbourhood Manager warned off a previous member of staff from giving evidence to the review

Get to get address and fix meeting

Questions arising from work to date

Who authorised the removal of files, documents and other material from the Independent Review Offices. Where did they go?

Is Eric Hill carrying out an enquiry and for who? (E. Sussex police)]

When files were collected from homes and offices were they returned? if not why not?

In the case of [redacted] and [redacted] what was the policy and attitude to the police and other agencies seeking information and access to files. Was it one of absolute openness to assist bona fide agencies in the possible apprehension of paedophiles or that all the files were highly confidential and the access would be restricted to answering only specific questions or some other position.?? Is there any formal guidance to managers and if there is could I see a copy. Forbid social workers to be policemen or let social workers and police work out a sensible relationship.

What were relations between Islington officers and the two sets of police and East Sussex Social Services??

Do Islington officers acknowledge or know that the Met Police were considering to going to court to force Islington to co-operate?

Why did [redacted] rather than [redacted] deal with East Sussex and the Police?? Alternatively why wasn't [redacted] involved directly??
Why are these matters dealt with by a Policy Officer.

Where is paper on . report

Where is the review in which says no further visits with

Where are the personal files on ; and]

Has commented on the independent investigation into finding a missing file?

· thinks ısk him to extract relevant bits of file whereas thinks that · · oddly extracted bits of file instead of just handing over the files.

] says he never took anything out of files but rather photo copies and flagged relevant bits thinks he had originals

Who took the flagged originals and put them loosely in the wrong file?

At the first meeting with East Sussex were they shown just the extracts and did they know they were just extracts

Where is the original of , letter?

Why are there two sets of flags bearing similar numbers but attached in the main to different documents.?

What is the significance of the second set of flags

Was anyone aware that the supervisory notes forbidding contact to TY were missing?

Does anyone in senior management know the circumstances in which the missing log book on came to be found and produced to head office? If they do was the issue taken up with C

What log book dic say was missing that was later produced and has this any connection with the missing Highbury Road File??

Who wrote on the file that information on Islington employees and children are not to be given to anybody??

Any knowledge of staff at Sheringham Road feeling harassed and unsupported? example of over use of agency staff.

Any knowledge of problems between and

What was the managerial response to the allegations of wide spread drug abuse at Sheringham Road (don't assume because I'm not talking to you that nothing is happening)

Do management agree that on reflection at the time of th incident there had been an intimidating environment around equal ops that inhibited managers from acting promptly.

Did it occur to anyone that CM defence of TY was in anyway connected with the fact that they were both homosexual

What managerial instructions are there on maintaining files ?

What quality checks are carried out on file keeping?

How would mgt. respond to feelings that they were defensive and did not want to hear bad news

Was there a parallel enquiry to the police enquiry into

were East Sussex police told tha. weekend visits not available or Log book for Grosvenor av. or letter from . mother? These later found

Comment

East Sussex don't see missing file as a big issue

Islington only a small part of East Sussex enquiry files they saw didn't contain basis inf. such as who authorised and paid for visits.

Got the impression that they were cutting across things going on inside Islington.

Confusion about letter from mother East Sussex thing saw letter via police but police think it was on file.

Little trust and confidence in contacts with Islington but not much elaboration

Shown a single file (there are 3)

T : told police that residential file was missing disappeared after

Police never seen residential file (did the court?)

Crucial to prosecution record of his dealings with

says Highbury file missing

East Sussex police didn't see review but were told about it by

Did Islington management think that the East Sussex police was any wider than it appeared.

Were agencies given the impression that files were "left in a cupboard somewhere "

Brian A. Mc Andrew,
Independent Consultant
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