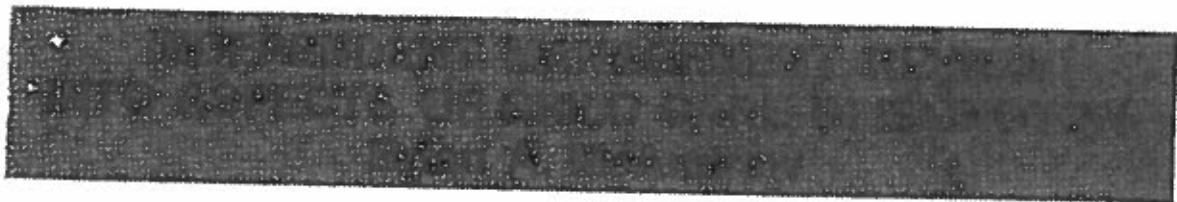
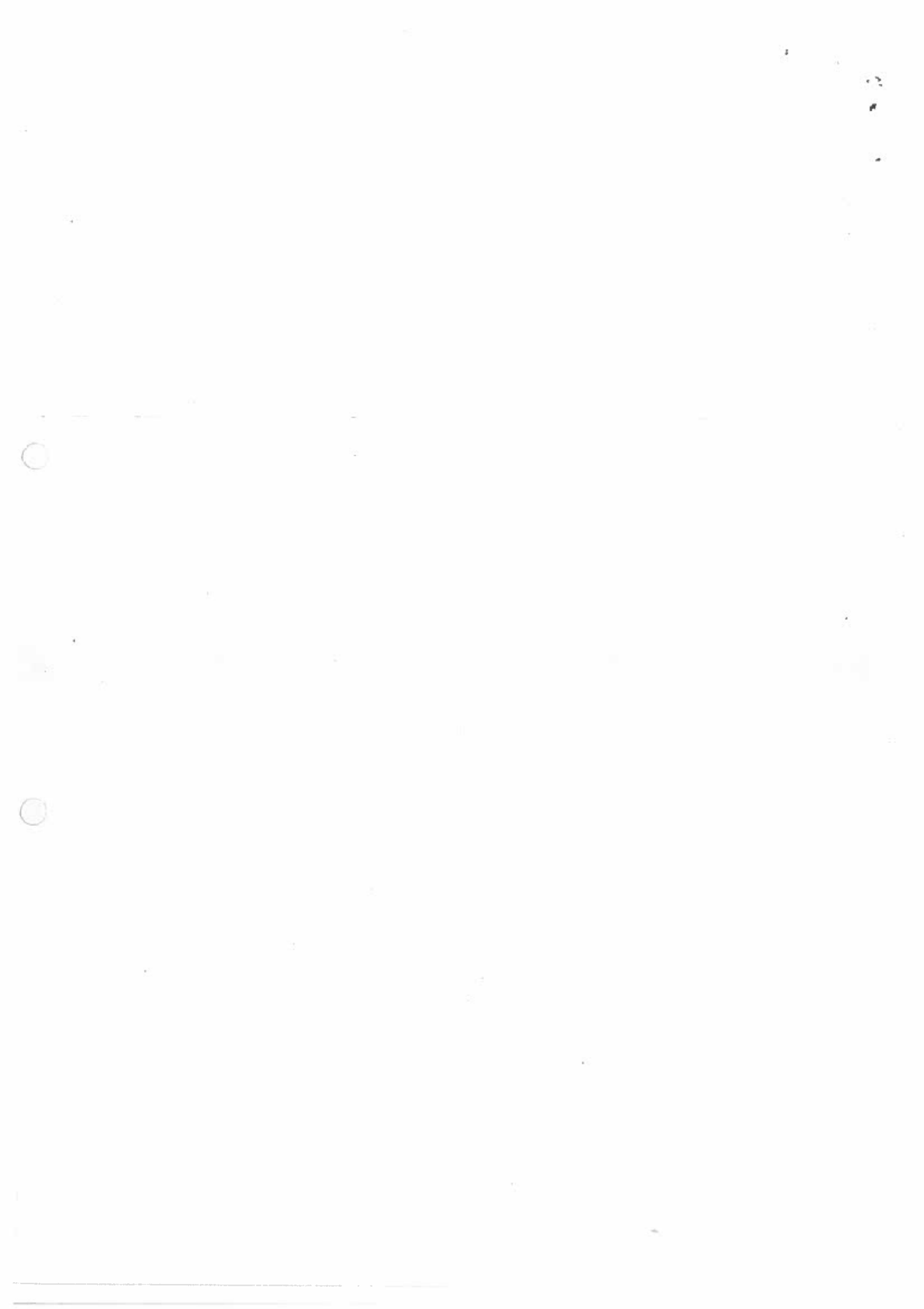


B.5



**INQUIRY INTO ALLEGATIONS  
CONCERNING MISSING FILES**

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Ref: MFREP  
Date: 18th February 1994**



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# 1 THE BRIEF

## 1.1 Background

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

An inference in the allegations was that the outside agencies, such as the police, investigating allegations of child abuse did not receive the co-operation they might reasonably have expect from Islington managers.

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. During this phase of the enquiry another 2 sets of documents were reported as missing. A variety of reports from [redacted] onwards on the management of Islington Social Services draw attention to deficiencies in files and administrative arrangements.

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

## **1.2 The Timetable**

The initial timetable involved producing an interim report by Christmas and a final report in mid January. This was not 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 review. This information will be included in the final work on phase 3.

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

## **1.3 Detailed allegations and concerns.**

### **That in case 1:**

- files were missing (2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3)
- files were taken for the trial have not been returned.(2.1.4)
- there was reluctant co-operation with the Metropolitan Police and files were withheld prior to trial of worker Z (2.2)
- the enquiry reported adversely on the files and documents in the case(2.3)

### **That in case 2**

- files were withheld (3.1.1,3.1.2),
- key documents were removed from files (3.1.3)
- there was reluctant co-operation with the East Sussex Police and Social Services.(3.2)

### **That in case 3**

The Jo Moad and Eva Learner reports list a range of concerns about files given in detail later in this report

The report

Attention was drawn to inadequate administrative systems

## **1.4 Methods**

Re read the statements made in phases 1 and 2 which might be relevant and noted any significant comments. Read in detail and annotated the three case 2 files. Read a residential file on Young Person A; an 88 page report by Jo Moad as an Independent Investigator into complaints about the care of Young Person C and a 25 page report by Eva Learner as the Independent Person under the Children Act regarding complaints about the care of Young Person C.

Interviewed two senior managers, six staff from agencies who contacted Islington about child abuse enquiries, two existing member of staff and five former members of staff.

## 2 CASE OF YOUNG PERSON 'A' AND WORKER 'Z' (CASE 1)

### 2.1 General

#### 2.1.1 The Gisburn File.

An early file was known to be missing during phase 1 and 2 of our review. Although no detailed enquiries were made at that stage we were surprised with the remark from a manager that given the state of the administration it was a wonder that anything was found. Further enquiry has not revealed why this file is missing. It referred to a period which was too early to be critical to the court case. It also appears that the accused drew attention to the fact that the file was missing.

#### 2.1.2 Sheringham road Log Book

A more critical missing document was a log book from the residential home where young person A was housed. I was told that despite extensive searches the head of home could not find this document. The head of home was on sick leave when a second call went out to produce this document. An acting deputy found the document in a box and in a sealed enveloped she said that they had previously been told that all this material



was highly confidential and was not to be touched. The document was hand delivered to Highbury House and as far as the deputy is concerned has not been seen since.

The background is that a fierce disagreement had taken place between residential and field workers around the care and possible fostering of young person A. People had become suspicious of each others motives and missing files feed into those suspicions. Those who found the log book say that after it was found and handed in it was not returned and they were given no further information. This may have added to an untrusting atmosphere.

I have interviewed the person who was the head of home. I was told that the reason files and other documents were in boxes and envelopes was that the home had moved out of a building and were in temporary accommodation. The building plans had gone wrong and the temporary arrangements were much longer than expected. I was the first person to tell her that the file had been found and she said she was surprised because she thought she had made a thorough search.. She vigorously denied that there had been any attempt to hide or withhold anything. She made the telling point that if she had been intent on hiding the file leaving it in a box in the home whilst she was on sick leave would have been ridiculous.

I assume that the log book went via the Assistant Director to the Court. All the managers involved in this incident have since left. I have not made any further attempt to locate the log book.

The comments of the head of home and one of the deputies are both credible. It is odd that this issue was not raised and resolved by normal managerial processes.

### **2.1.3 The Supervisors Notes**

An interview with a former member of staff revealed another missing document. Worker Z, according to the witness, had been told formally that he was not to have any further contact with young person A. When worker Z was arrested the witness went through the filing system to find his personal log book containing the notes of his various supervisory sessions with worker Z, he could not find the file. He did not attach particular significance to the event and I was the first person whom he told. I am puzzled that no one thought it significant that there was no record of worker Z's supervision. The head of home knew nothing of the issue and was surprised that the notes were missing because the Supervisor was meticulous about such things.

There is no obvious explanation for these notes being missing.

#### **2.1.4 The Fostering Files**

During the course of the review it became clear that the fostering documents which were built up whilst Worker Z was being assessed as a possible fosterer of young person A were missing. I spoke to a fostering officer who told me they had been removed from his desk prior to the trial and had not been returned.

According to a witness these documents contained evidence of the total unsuitability of Worker Z as a fosterer.

I have no reason to doubt that the document reached the court but it has yet to be produced

#### **2.2 Co-operation with the Police**

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 young person A. The person I spoke to contrasted this bad experience with the good experience they had in working with staff of the neighbourhood office.

There appears to have been some personal animosity between a member of the police team and a member of the Islington team. The Islington manager concerned was unaware of any such animosity.

The frustration of the police 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 these two levels of Islington management. 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.

Many of the relevant files were being considered by Peter Smith who had been commissioned to study the case of young person A and that study ran close to the trial date.

### **2.3 The Peter Smith Enquiry**

This enquiry drew attention to the many deficiencies in the treatment of young person A. The report also drew particular attention to the inadequacy of the files and documentation.

## 3 CASE OF YOUNG PERSON 'B' AND WORKER 'X' (CASE 2)

### 3.1 THE MISSING FILES AND DOCUMENTATION

#### 3.1.1 The main files

There is some confusion about what documentation East Sussex Police and Social Services saw. When the request for co-operation was received a senior Islington officer asked an officer in a neighbourhood to produce relevant documentation from the files. The senior officer's recollections are that the neighbourhood officer offered to extract the relevant information from the files which he thought was helpful if unusual. The Neighbourhood Officer then sent relevant original material from the file which was used in a meeting with East Sussex Officers. At that meeting the East Sussex Officers asked for additional information and the senior officer then asked that all the files be sent to him. He told me that he did this to satisfy himself that all the information had been shared. These were used in a subsequent meeting but did not yield the information sought such as how the visits of young person B to the home of worker X were authorised and paid for.

The recollections of the Neighbourhood Officer are different in that he believes he was asked to search the files and produce copies of relevant material which he

did. He agrees that he later produced all the relevant files. Later illustrations will show that the senior officers memory is more accurate. East Sussex Officers were not impressed with the information contained on the files but they may have mistakenly thought that the extracts were the files. The Islington officer's recollection is that he made it clear that East Sussex were being shown extracts.

### **3.1.2 The personal file of worker X**

As part of the enquiry into allegations made against worker X East Sussex Police and Social Services asked for various documents including the workers personal file. This was not immediately forthcoming and together with matters dealt with above led to speculation that co-operation was not what it should have been and that documentation was only produced after adverse publicity.

This is denied by Islington Social Services managers who say they produced from their own resources all that was asked for. In the case of the personal file this was in the possession of the personnel department and could not be found. Social Services managers were however assured that had there been any significant disciplinary issues these would be on other records. Since there were no such entries the personal file

would contain little of any significance. The personal file was eventually found and made available. I have not been offered any reason as to why the first efforts failed to produce the file. The reassurance were ill founded in that the file contains a reference to elected members considering the workers continuing employment in the light of a drugs conviction. I have seen no evidence to suggest that the failure to produce this file was due to malice rather than administrative failure.

### **3.1.3 Missing Documents**

During phase 2 of the review a social worker noticed that key documents appeared to be missing from the file. These were a letter for the mother of young person B expressing concern with the relationship between her son and worker X, a review chaired by the Assistant Director forbidding further visits by young person B to worker X's home and a report from a child psychotherapist suggesting that the visits be stopped.

When these matters were drawn to the attention of management at the beginning of this phase of the review all the files were examined and it was reported that the mother's letter and the review curtailing visits could be found loose in a file other than the one for the relevant period. The senior officer involved believed on

his reading of the file that there never was a formal letter of advise from a clinic but that the social worker recorded the views of the psychotherapist.

I have studied all the files and made a record of the date of all entries. I can confirm that many key documents are to be found loose in the 'wrong' file. The letter from the mother is a feint photo copy. The review is for the right period and does refer to curtailing visits but it is not a review chaired by the Assistant Director. The Assistant Director did claim earlier that she had chaired such a review and the only conclusion therefore is that the review is missing or the Assistant Directors recall is at fault.

Each of the documents is flagged with a numbered poststick. A similar set of poststicks can be found in the relevant file. I have assumed that what has happened is that key original documents were removed at the beginning of the police enquiry and that these were flagged and numbered. An identical set of numbered flags were placed in the relevant file in order make refiling easier. The original documents were not refiled but were placed loosely in the 'wrong file'. When the social worker reviewed the relevant file during phase 1 of the review it was without key documents and the flags were meaningless.



### 3.2 Co-operation with East Sussex Police and Social Services

I have interviewed officers of East Sussex Social Services and East Sussex Police. They were both disappointed with the co-operation they received from Islington. The disappointment included suspicion that co-operation was not forthcoming because there was something going on in Islington which they did not understand but which was nonetheless interfering with co-operation. 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 for young person B to worker X came to be authorised and paid for. They were concerned as to how visits continued after the mother's letter and after senior officials decided that the visits should stop. Islington was only a part of their enquiries and I gained the impression that they did not think it worth the effort to pursue the matter.

Islington officers were unaware of any dissatisfaction from East Sussex but they were not surprised that they were unimpressed with the handling of the case. One explanation offered was that East Sussex understandably poor view of the treatment of young person B whilst in Islington's care spilt over into mistrust of the co-operation and information they were

receiving. As with the Metropolitan Police these feelings of dissatisfaction were not conveyed at the time and it is therefore not surprising that they were not dealt with. There is also no doubt that such feelings did exist and this will be referred to in the conclusions and recommendations.

## 4. CASE OF YOUNG PERSON 'C'(CASE 3)

### 4.1 GENERAL

Complaints about the treatment of young person C whilst in the care of Islington were made by his residential carers. Amongst the issues was that a critical file was missing. The enquiries by Jo Moad and Eva Learner revealed other missing files although one was found during the course of one enquiry.

The main thrust of the reports is about the specific complaints but like other enquiries they provide valuable advice and insights into the importance of administrative systems and filing to the effective care of young people.

#### 4.1.1 The missing Critical File

One of the concerns with young person C is that he may have been subject to abuse. Work had started on this by a social worker who had begun to gain his confidence. The Social Worker suddenly disappeared and the file for the period disappeared at the same time. One theory is that he returned to New Zealand and took the file with him. There is no obvious reason why he should have done so. This was a blow to the work been done with young person C and the loss of

the file makes it more difficult for others to take up the work.

This was a regrettable incident but it is difficult to think what Islington could have done to anticipate it or any new procedures that would prevent a recurrence. It may point to the need for better security but the hope must be that the incident was a bizarre and one-off event.

#### **4.2. Reports by Jo Moad and Eva Learner**

The following are extracts relating to files and record keeping taken from reports produced by Jo Moad and Eva Learner. I have taken out names where appropriate to protect the identity of the young person

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 a case conference between 1991 and 1992 or any response to a document sent to Islington "C's 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 to C be retained in Calshot Neighbourhood Office so that they can be easily accessed in the future if required. *(the files have now been transferred to another Local Authority)*

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. *(This has been done)*

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 .

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.

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 (the social worker) left the Islington Department. The period covered by this file is unclear except that it is likely to be the entire record of social work undertaken in 1990 and possibly a substantial amount of material from autumn 1989

Thanks to the work undertaken by Jo Moad, the first file also missing until mid October 1993, was found in the archives. While this file was retrieved towards the end of the researching period it was helpful in giving a picture-----"

#### Conclusion 4.3 Page 18

"There is an issue here for the Department in respect of making available trained staff to take notes at Review and other meetings of importance."

#### Recommendations Page 27

The one person that was pivotal to much of what came later, was,(the Social Worker) who unfortunately, became ill and left without warning taking critical records with him. Given this there is much to be said about the importance of records systems and supervision of workers."

On the last page of Eva Learner's report she lists 5 good practices the second of which is:

"The place and purpose of recording is sharply identified in this case. Files exist for communicating actions and progress. They should not be removed from offices without permission, if at all. Managers must identify a security system for files."

*(Islington now has dedicated staff to minute all child protection conferences)*



## 5 OTHER MATTERS

### 5.1 The Liam Johnson Report.

Amongst the concerns expressed by the authors of the report was the need for better administrative support in general. In particular they recommended professional note takers for case conferences and greater specialisation in administrative staff. To quote;

“10.16 The pressures on the administrative side are just as great. -----This means that there is often no one available to carry out routine tasks such as filing or typing”

This may go some way to explain the generally poor standard of record keeping.

### 5.2 The Archives

I paid a brief visit to the archives because I had heard many criticism of this area. When I put the criticism to staff they said that they may well have been justified up to eighteen months ago. However, they believe that since they moved to new premises they have been able to provide a good service. The system is surprisingly manual but they are looking forward to going on to the computerised CRISP system. Whilst I was there they

undertook several searches for me and these seem effective with good cross references. Once records are in this system there is now reasonable hope that they will be well kept and disposed of according to well defined criteria. Current resources do not allow for systematic reviews, pruning and disposal of filed material. This will mean that in a relatively short time an increasing percentage of the available space will be taken up with dead material.

It was also reported to me that there is no accurate central process to enable anyone to locate files and that the central record store is overburdened with files which are uncoded.

### **5.3 Master set of child care records**

Questioning of one witness has revealed that the master set of child care records was inadvertently destroyed in May 1993. This strengthens the case for much improved systems of security. There is also a case for education and assertion of professional standards, if it is true, that the loss of this irreplaceable asset was not a matter of concern to other managers.

## **6 CONCLUSIONS**

### **6.1. Malice mischief carelessness or what? Possible reasons for files and documents being missing**

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 therefore 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.

### **6.1.1 Malice**

In the case of the social worker who disappeared with the file on young person C it is difficult to assign the action to anything other than malice.

### **6.1.2. Carelessness not conspiracy**

As for the rest of the incidents the evidence indicates that neither management or any one else deliberately withheld or hid information in order to cover up.

The picture that emerges is not however a consolation for Islington. What appears to have happened is a mixture of carelessness, confusion, poor communication, poor standards and neglect of administrative support. As pressure on resources has mounted good practice has suffered in the name of survival.

### **6.1.3 Importance of good routines**

Good routines, good administrative systems and support are as important to maintaining standards of child care as the direct action of social workers. All recent external studies of the management of child care in Islington have drawn attention this.

#### **6.1.4 Balanced support**

It is, of course important to maintain a balance between practitioners and those who support them. It is understandable that support, be it managerial or administrative, receives a tough scrutiny but the point can be reached at which the imbalance erodes everyone's effectiveness. The authors of the report talked about a time bomb waiting to explode. The Evening Standard reports could be regarded as just such a bomb. Another and slower process has occurred which has sapped and corroded managerial and administrative support. When that occurs practitioners end up as part time administrators to the detriment of administration and clients alike.

#### **6.2 Obstruction, defensiveness or misunderstanding? Possible reasons for claims of lack of co-operation with other agencies.**

- They are untrue and a misunderstanding by the other agencies, the press or both.
- 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.
- There was a serious failure of communication between the parties
- 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 generally defend the , interests of the authority and that was best done by giving minimum co-operation.
- Any combination of the above

### **6.2.1 Opposite perceptions**

The press picked up the feelings that all was not well between the agencies and Islington. Whether the press picked that up directly or indirectly is unknown. My

enquires confirm that as the feelings of at least some of the members of those agencies.

Islington officers seemed genuinely perplexed by these allegations. There had been no formal or informal complaints at the time of the contact and they asked that if those feelings had been around why had no one mentioned it until now.

Officers of the other agencies were prepared to live with those feelings until in one case court action was considered to order co-operation. It is astonishing that this information was not available at the time but I accept that it was not.

When questioned about co-operation Islington officers were adamant that the letter of the policy was given in the child protection manual and they practised the spirit of co-operation in their contacts with other agencies. They did not, they said, hold back to cover up or to defend corporate or individual interests or for any other reason. As far as they were concerned they were giving whole hearted co-operation and responding fully to any request made. They not only rejected the claims they resented them.

### 6.2.2 Two demands for the same files

One source of misunderstanding was that at the time files and other documents were required for the enquiry they were also required for preparing for the trial of worker Z. It is understandable that there was tension but it is not clear whether the Police understood that the files were being used by a consultant. It is also unclear whether the Peter Smith enquiry needed to be run so close to the trial of worker Z.

In the case of East Sussex confusion may have arisen between seeing extracts from the files rather than the files. The Islington officer says he made it clear that they were extracts.

### 6.2.3 A Jaundiced view

Two other elements may also have influenced the low opinions of Islington. One is the poor quality of information and its retrieval and the other is that in both cases the treatment that the young people received was, to put it mildly, well below standard. This may have disturbed confidence, and the resultant sceptical view of what was happening in Islington could have been translated into non co-operation.



#### **6.2.4 Standardising the response**

Another key element in misunderstanding is the point of the contact. It appears that given the structure of the Neighbourhood Services department how a request for co-operation is received can determine who deals with it. If for instance the request is received by a neighbourhood office it will be dealt with there under the supervision of the appropriate Assistant Director. If the request is received at Headquarters it will be dealt with by the Assistant Director with overall responsibility for child care who is likely to delegate it to someone she feels appropriate.

Islington might wish to consider a more standardised way of dealing with requests for inter agency co-operation wherever the initial request is received. The minimum to be achieved is that all the relevant people know that such a contact had been made and can play their part.

#### **6.2.5 Getting the contact at the best level**

In one case a policy officer dealt with the request and was supplied with information by an officer who had the files and knowledge of the case. When after the first meeting more information was required the policy officer had to go back to the officer who held the information.

In the case of the Metropolitan Police the relationships appear to have been good between the equivalent ranks on both sides. As the nature of the enquiries change to a criminal prosecution and there was more mixing of the ranks the resentments appear to have begun.

The level of the contact in Islington's case should be the lowest reasonable level. It is difficult to see, for instance, where these activities come in the remit of a senior policy officer other than being a willing and available pair of hands. An agency is likely to get much more out of direct contact with the person directly responsible for the case. This also leaves more senior staff free to deal with any strategic issues or matters of significant principal arising from the contact.

One reason given for raising the level at which the contact is made is that it may involve more than one neighbourhood office. It may still be better to leave the main contact at practitioner level and ask them to make the contact with other offices. This would have the incidental benefit of fostering a corporate spirit.

#### **6.2.6 Maximising information and minimising speculation**

Great care needs to be taken when information is put together at one level and passed to a more senior level or where an issue has been dealt with at practitioner level and is taken up at a more senior level. People at

practitioner level will often have an investment in the issue and this needs to be understood and respected. Respect as part of good management means involvement, the minimum level of which is keeping people informed about what is going on. There was some suggestion that this was not occurring. One witness said that on making enquiry they were told "just because we are not telling you anything do not assume that nothing is happening". If dramatic things are happening and there are gaps in information they will be filled by speculations. Such speculations are unlikely to be helpful to management.

This lack of communication contributed to worries and speculation about what had happened to files and documents.

#### **6.2.7 General conclusions on allegations of non co-operation**

I believe that some members of the agency teams believed that they were not getting whole hearted co-operation from Islington officers. It is regrettable that they did not find a way of raising the issue at the time. I also believe that Islington officers thought they were offering co-operation and they are clear that policy on child protection demands that they do so. For a combination of reasons, listed above, the a wrong impression was given and or taken.

### 6.3 More detailed conclusions

I would recommend that these comments are used in association with the conclusions and recommendations given in the Eva Learner and Jo Moad Reports. I concur with their recommendations and conclusions with the exception of the recommendation that all files should be kept at the neighbourhood office.

#### 6.3.1 Where and how files should be kept

I conclude that files should be kept both at the neighbourhood office and the residential unit. Such records should be to a commonly agreed format, and be both complementary and supplementary. Reviews and care plans might reasonably be on both residential and field work files whereas a daily log would only appear as a residential item. In an earlier report Jo Tunnard and I drew attention to the need for residential homes to hold individual records on young people rather than general log books.

Files should be someone's specific security responsibility. This should not detract from them being available to relevant people such as the assigned social worker, the key worker the duty staff and all their managers and supervisors.

*(a detailed policy was introduced in November 92 in accordance with Childrens Homes Regulations 91)*

### **6.3.2 Using and sharing files**

Whilst security is important referring to documentation as a routine should be encouraged. Like a visiting doctor in a hospital, a social worker should read what has been written about the client in residential documentation and a key worker should regularly see what has been added to residential files. There appears to be a culture of exclusiveness of residential records being for residential staff and fieldwork files for field workers. Managers should also regularly use the files as a principle way of updating themselves and of making judgements on the standard of work of service 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

### **6.3.3 Upgrading Record Keeping**

It is a worrying aspect of the reviews by Moad and Learner that highly relevant documents were found part way through an enquiry. Even more worrying is that a visiting consultant appears to have found a lost document in the archives. 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.

Consideration should be given to making the archive function pivotal for all record keeping throughout the Department

#### **6.3.4. Maintaining good record systems**

Incidents in the case of all three young people seriously detract from the confidence in the content of the files.

References in two reports to 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 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 case 2 were neat, clear and chronological. They provided a welcome relief from a generally poor standard. Apart from the direct consequences of poor record keeping 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 they provide a history for enquirers like me to show that proper procedures were followed and reasonable decisions were made. Managerially they are a major source of intelligence.

The main way in which people pick up what a management believes is important is by what is monitored, what is rewarded and what is punished. The maintenance and security of the record keeping system should be a well taught part of good practice and should feature as an aspect of supervision, appraisal and promotion.

*(A report is expected shortly from management services and in the meantime instructions have been issued on basic standards and monitoring)*

#### **6.3.5 New Technology**

Consideration should be given to issuing electronic notebooks to social workers and others who make frequent record entries. The costs of this technology has plummeted and the use of it would assist with entries being made on agreed forms and to a reasonable standard of clarity. Hard copy could be made from printers held in the neighbourhood offices and centrally and the floppy disks create an easily stored record for the author and others. It is considerably cheaper than typing hand-written or dictated notes into hard copy. There are many other possibilities for this type of technology such as the holding of reference

material on floppy disks. A report by management services would highlight these possibilities and the costs of moving to a technology appropriate for social services in the nineties.

#### **6.3.6 Managerial action**

Managers were concerned about the lack of standards and are issuing standards and guidance.. I have seen many excellent policy documents but I have also detected an environment in which implementation and monitoring are difficult and patchy. Without this nothing is likely to change. The various working groups set up to take stage 2 forward are the best hope of ensuring a move from comment to action.

#### **6.4 Overall conclusions**

In considering this report it is most important to see the allegations of non co-operation and missing files in the wider context. That wider context was detailed in the Phase 2 report submitted by Emlyn Cassam and myself. The planned implementation of that report would do much to clear up these difficulties.

It is particularly important that the administrative support for practitioners should be strengthened even at the cost of practitioners. Islington has a high ratio of social workers to population but this is not reflected in administrative support.



## 7 RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.1 GENERAL

#### 7.1.1 Implementation

- a) That whatever recommendations are accepted they form part of an implementation plan approved by Elected Members, the Chief Executive or the Director as appropriate.
- b) That the recommendations of this report be considered in conjunction with the recommendations of the other recent reports dealing with record keeping and administration.
- c) That implementation be integrated into the work being carried out as a result of an earlier report by Emlyn Cassam and myself.
- d) That external monitors be invited to make recommendations on progress in six months and a year.

#### 7.1.2 Review of administration systems and support

That in the light of the failings and difficulties revealed in this and other reports management review the current levels and character of administrative and clerical support.

## **7.2 Detailed recommendations**

### **7.2.1. Good policy and procedures**

That the work already begun on detailing good practice and standardised forms and systems of record keeping be accelerated.

### **7.2.2 Enforcement of good practice**

That the maintenance, security and use of records be a part of supervisory sessions for social workers and social worker managers. That these good practices also feature in considering people for promotion and in any system of performance appraisal.

### **7.2.3 Centres of specialisation and excellence**

An individual manager and a part of the organisation should be selected to provide leadership in excellence of record keeping and in complementary systems. This should be a member of the management team and the archival system might provide a good resource and focus.

### **7.2.4 New Technology**

That to improve record keeping and to directly support social workers and others a review be commissioned of the use of electronic notebooks linked to neighbourhood and central systems.

### **7.2.5 Standardising the contact with agencies**

Wherever contact is made by external agencies seeking co-operation with enquires a standard procedure should be implemented in order that the relevant people know of the contact and an appropriate response is made.

### **7.2.6 Getting the level of contact right**

Those who do the face to face work with agencies should wherever possible be the practitioners with personal knowledge of the issues under enquiry.

### **7.2.7 Keeping people informed**

Where enquiries are being made all staff should be told of the progress of such enquiries and steps be taken to limit speculation by building trust with good communication and involvement

## **8 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **CHAPTER 1 THE BRIEF**

I was asked to look at aspects of the Evening Standard allegations concerned with missing files and a spirit of non co-operation. The introduction gives details of the allegations and a further case in which missing files and the standards of record keeping were an issue.

### **CHAPTERS 2,3,&4 YOUNG PERSONS A, B & C**

These three chapters look in detail at the allegations concerning missing files documents and non co-operation. One notable case of malice is noted but in the main the evidence points to carelessness, misinformation and miscommunication rather than any conspiracy or cover up. Detailed attention is draw to other recent reports and there recommendation for improvements in record keeping and administrative support. In the case of the enquiries from East Sussex it is easy to see how misunderstandings arose but the evidence does not indicate that the Islington Officer who handled the enquiries withheld documents.

### **CHAPTER 5 OTHER MATTERS**

Matters outside the three young people are dealt with in this chapter. The concerns of the report are detailed together with the findings of a visit to the archives. The chapter finishes with concerns with the loss of the master set of child care records.

### **CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS**

The major conclusion is that whilst Islington should be pleased that their does not appear to be any deliberate

withholding of information or obstruction of other agencies much needs to be done to avoid serious failures.

The system of administrative and clerical support is collapsing and with it good practice and standards in record keeping.

This chapter takes each issue and suggest how misunderstandings may have arisen.

## **CHAPTER 7 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The report concludes with a series of recommendations. The first recommendation is for an implementation and monitoring plan. Such a plan should also be integrated into the work being done to implement earlier reports. There is a general recommendation on rebalancing administrative and clerical support.

Detailed recommendations are made on maintaining good policy and practice and enforcement of standards. A centre of excellence is recommended together with the use of new technology. Recommendations deal with the need for standardisation when agencies contact Islington

The level at which contact is maintained is recommended a s practitioner level wherever possible

The final recommendation is concerned with good communication, particularly at difficult times, to encourage trust and avoid speculation.

