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INDEPENDENT MANAGEMENT REVIEW

INTO ASPECTS OF CHILD CARE

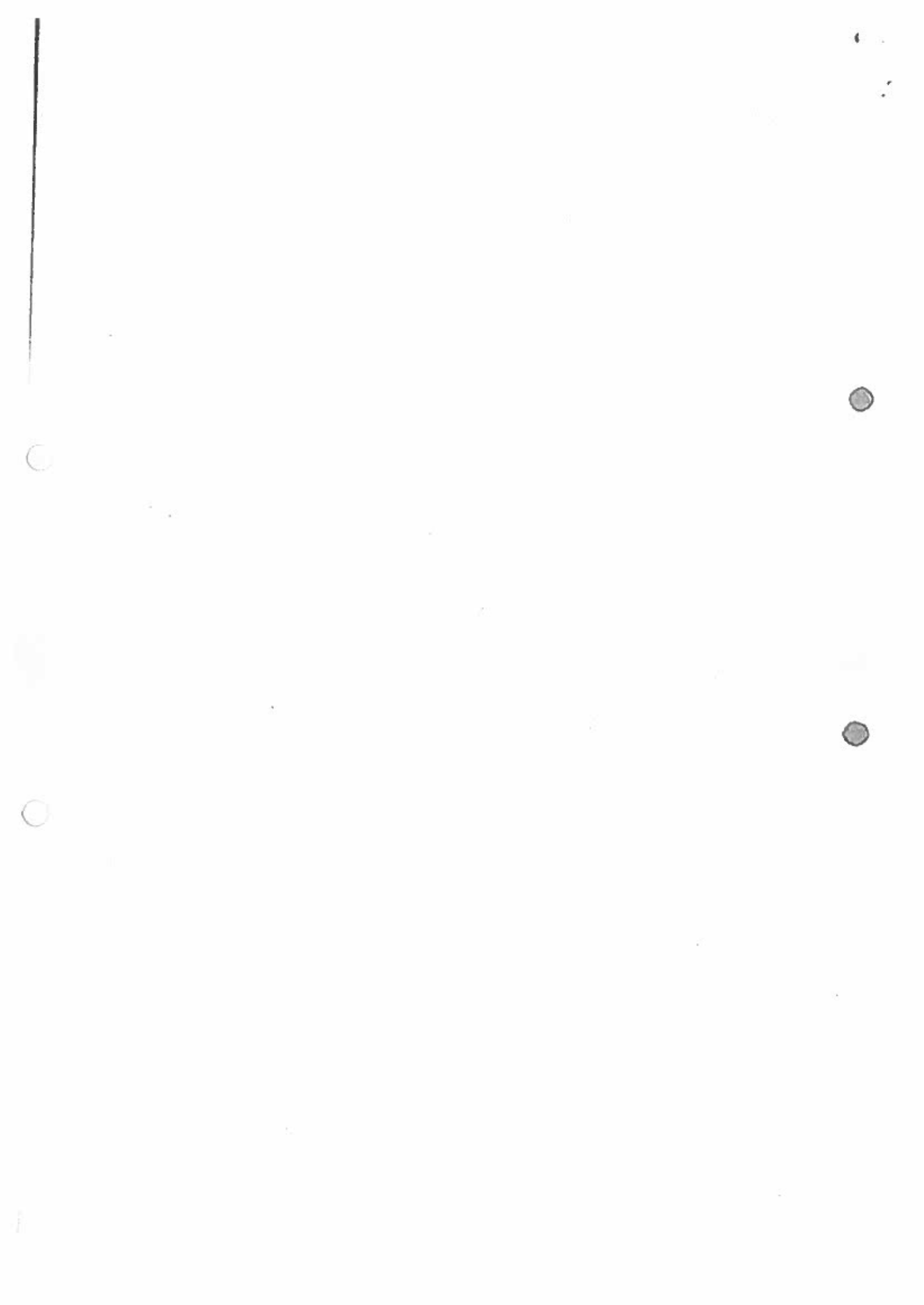
IN ISLINGTON

INTERIM REPORT
FOR
THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE
OF
ISLINGTON COUNCIL

BY

JO TUNNARD AND BRIAN Mc ANDREW

3 FEBRUARY 1993

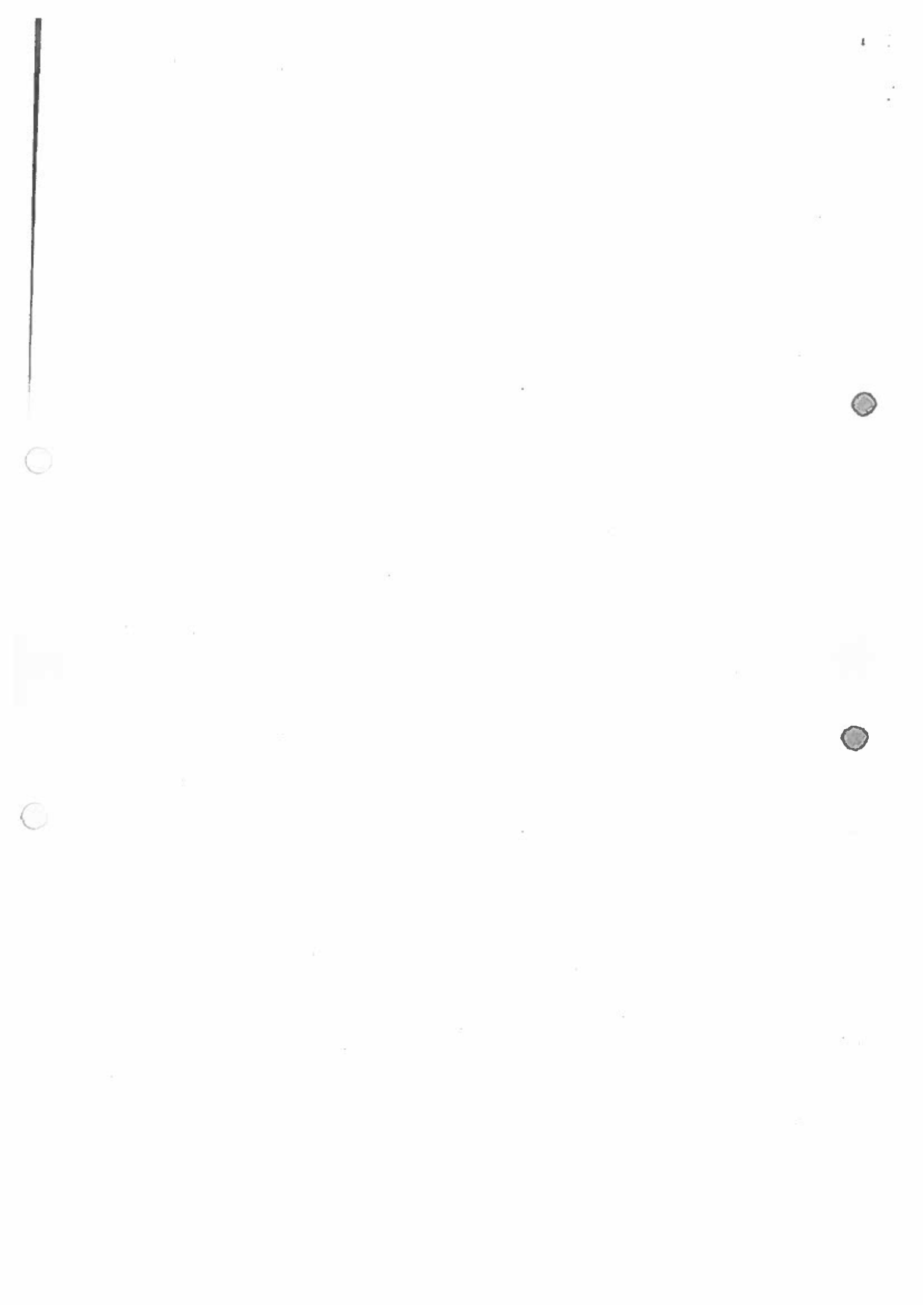


A NOTE OF CAUTION

This report has been prepared for the Chief Executive of Islington Council. The Chief Executive has sent a copy to the Department of Health.

As it stands, the report contains confidential information about young people and their families. Most have co-operated willingly in helping us prepare our report. The experience has been a painful one for them all.

It is our sincere wish that their right to privacy is respected.



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1. SUMMARY

Terms of reference for the interim report

- 1.1 This is the interim report of the independent management review that was set up following reports about child care in Islington published in the Evening Standard in October 1992.
- 1.2 The interim report was to be completed by Christmas 1992 and was to cover:
 - (a) the individual cases identified in the Evening Standard regarding their present welfare and such other matters as the review considers relevant, and
 - (b) whether the named children's residential homes are currently out of control.
- 1.3 Early in the review it was obvious that the time scales were totally out of proportion to the task. We undertook to complete the interim report and then discuss what time might be needed for the remaining terms of reference. We also negotiated an extension to 3 February 1993 for the interim report.
- 1.4 Looking at the welfare of the identified young people was part of the substantive term of reference that required us to examine the care, control and services provided to them. It was impossible to make any meaningful observations on the individual cases without first understanding the framework of services provided. As a result, some of our comments in this report relate to the care, control and services that the young people received.

The young people identified - our approach

- 1.5 To protect the identity of the young people and their families the following summary is a highly condensed version of the confidential part of our report to Islington Council.
- 1.6 In order to get as full a picture as possible we attempted to talk to each of the young people, important family members, and social workers who had had recent contact.
- 1.7 In two cases the young people did not wish to see us. In another case contact is promised but not yet achieved. We met one young person socially but had previously judged that it would be inappropriate to interview them.
- 1.8 We talked with another young person sufficiently to form only a fleeting impression. With the help of young people,

their families, and residential and field social workers we have built a picture of their current welfare.

The current welfare of the young people

- 1.9 All the young people have been abused in some way, some for a short period at home and others for long periods away from home, including time spent in care.
- 1.10 Two of the young people are technically homeless - they live with their family but are without a bed or bedroom. Neither young person has paid employment and their accommodation problems need to be addressed if the present stable situation is to be maintained. Another young person, generally acknowledged to be working as a prostitute, is homeless and has been without other income for several weeks.
- 1.11 One young person is living in a safe environment but is not coping well with the after effects of sexual abuse. Another young person is in a bad environment and is coping very badly, to the point at which their family take seriously their threats of suicide.
- 1.12 A recent new placement for a young person appears to be working well but they remain badly shaken and angry with their recent experience in care. A young person with their own accommodation appears to be coping satisfactorily. The eighth young person is maintaining increasing contact with their family but both they and their family remain deeply distressed by their experiences in care.
- 1.13 The almost universal message from families is that when their children went into care, for whatever reason, they expected that they would be well looked after. The damage has been done, and it is too late for their children, but it is not too late to try to ensure that it never happens again to anyone else's children.
- 1.14 A relative of a young person who was abused sexually before coming into care wanted a message to be given to all parents to guard their children, particularly against those who form friendships in order to abuse their children.

The residential units - our approach

- 1.15 To answer the question about being out of control we had to determine what we and others meant by that phrase. That information was used to draw up our interview questions. There was a surprisingly wide agreement on what was meant by a home being out of control. We talked to young people in the homes as well as residential and field staff and managers.

In or out of control?

- 1.16 We have a wide range of concerns, some of which require further work for the final report. They include the disgusting state of one of the buildings and the lack of a feeling of safety and security. Also lacking is something as basic as a well-established and well-publicised complaints procedure, a vital element in combatting abuse and malpractice.
- 1.17 We discovered that both units had been in difficulty to the point that it would be reasonable to say that for a period they were out of control. We believe that without change the same situation could recur.
- 1.18 During our visits to the units they were not, in the popular sense, out of control. Staff were in control of what they can reasonably be expected to control.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 In October 1992 the Evening Standard published a series of feature-length articles and editorial comments about aspects of child care in Islington. The articles made wide-ranging criticism of the Council's failure to protect children in the community and young people in residential care.
- 2.2 We were invited to conduct a management review, according to terms of reference agreed by Islington Council and the DOH.
- 2.3 The terms of reference were as follows:
1. As an interim measure:
 - (a) to report on the individual cases identified in the Evening Standard regarding their present welfare and such other matters as the review considers relevant, and
 - (b) to report as to whether the named children's residential homes are currently out of control.
 2. As a final report:
 - (a) To examine the care, control and services provided to individual young people identified in the Evening Standard articles of 6 and 7 October 1992.
 - (b) To examine the care and range of services provided to children and young people accommodated at Islington's children's homes and the management of these services.
 - (c) To examine the arrangements and the effective management of child care services and cases between the Neighbourhood Services Department and its neighbourhood offices.
 - (d) To examine a range of personnel matters concerned with the management of staff who are subject of allegations in the Evening Standard articles of professional malpractice.
 - (e) To make recommendations.
- 2.4 There was an additional term of reference included in the Council's press release of 22 October 1992. It was to examine the departmental and inter-agency arrangements for investigations of incidents of organised or network abuse.

This has not been included as part of the brief of the review team. We were informed by the Council that that work was to be undertaken by the SSI.

2.5 We now submit our interim report.

3. OUR APPROACH

3.1 The remit of the interim report

In relation to the young people, preliminary discussions with the Council indicated that 6 had been identified in the newspaper reports, that one of them was black, and that 2 neighbourhood offices were involved. When we began work it became clear that there were 8 young people to consider, that 3 of them are black, and that 6 offices were involved.

- 3.2 In relation to the residential homes, we have assumed that our task was to examine the current situation at the two units whose full address was publicised in the articles.

Keeping an eye on the main report

- 3.3 As the brief of the interim stage is linked closely with all the terms of reference, and especially the first, we have aimed to collect information at the early stage which would prove useful also for the later work. We did not, for instance, wish to interview people just about the current welfare of the young people and then have to invite them back later to talk about the care, control and services they had received.

- 3.4 Our aim has been to collect as much first-hand information as possible and to supplement that, where time allowed, by reading background material and case files.

Contact with individuals

- 3.5 We have conducted interviews with 64 people. Most lasted between one and two hours. These are recorded in typed form, amounting to several hundred pages. As well as being used for this report they will help inform the final report. We have also had a lengthy phone conversation with someone who approached us.

- 3.6 Over 30 people (current and former staff, foster carers and others) have indicated that they would like to give evidence to the review or have been suggested to us as important people to invite for interview. We have heard from several quarters that some people would have more confidence in giving evidence to a public inquiry rather than to an independent management review.

- 3.7 We have been acutely conscious of the industrial action which has continued during our work. We are extremely grateful to those who took time to leave the extra pressures of their work place, and to those who came in

from the strike, to help us with our task. Others came in from sick leave or annual holiday. Almost without exception, staff have responded generously to our questions and our requests for guidance.

- 3.8 Similarly, we are grateful to those not in Islington's employ who have taken time - and sometimes time off - to inform our thinking. We reserve special thanks for the young people and their families who were willing to give thought to our invitations to meet them and were, for the most part, willing to bear our intrusion into their life.

Involving the community

- 3.9 In keeping with the spirit of consultation that underpins the Children Act, we decided to publish a short newsletter at the start of our work. This single A4 sheet set out the terms of reference, introduced ourselves and our planned method of work, and invited contributions from groups and individuals. Our aim was to achieve early and wide circulation to a range of relevant people - including young people currently looked after and their families; field and residential workers and managers; foster carers; Council officers, ACPC members and elected members; and solicitors, guardians ad litem and voluntary organisations and newspapers in or serving the borough. We comment later on the distribution achieved.

A note on terminology

- 3.10 Throughout the report we use the term "in care" to refer to the pre-October 1991 provision of voluntary or compulsory care. We also use it to refer to the experiences of young people who are accommodated or under a care order under the Children Act 1989. We have adopted this style because, although not technically correct in all circumstances where it is used, it reflects the way that young people and their families have described their experiences.
- 3.11 When referring to the young people we use the words "s/he" and "their" in order to do what we can to protect their identity.
- 3.12 When referring to the two units that we have examined we use the initials "A" and "B".

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Following legal advice and Case Review last night, case histories which could identify young people have been deleted. Paragraphs 4. 6 - 4. 24 are therefore omitted.

18. 2. 93



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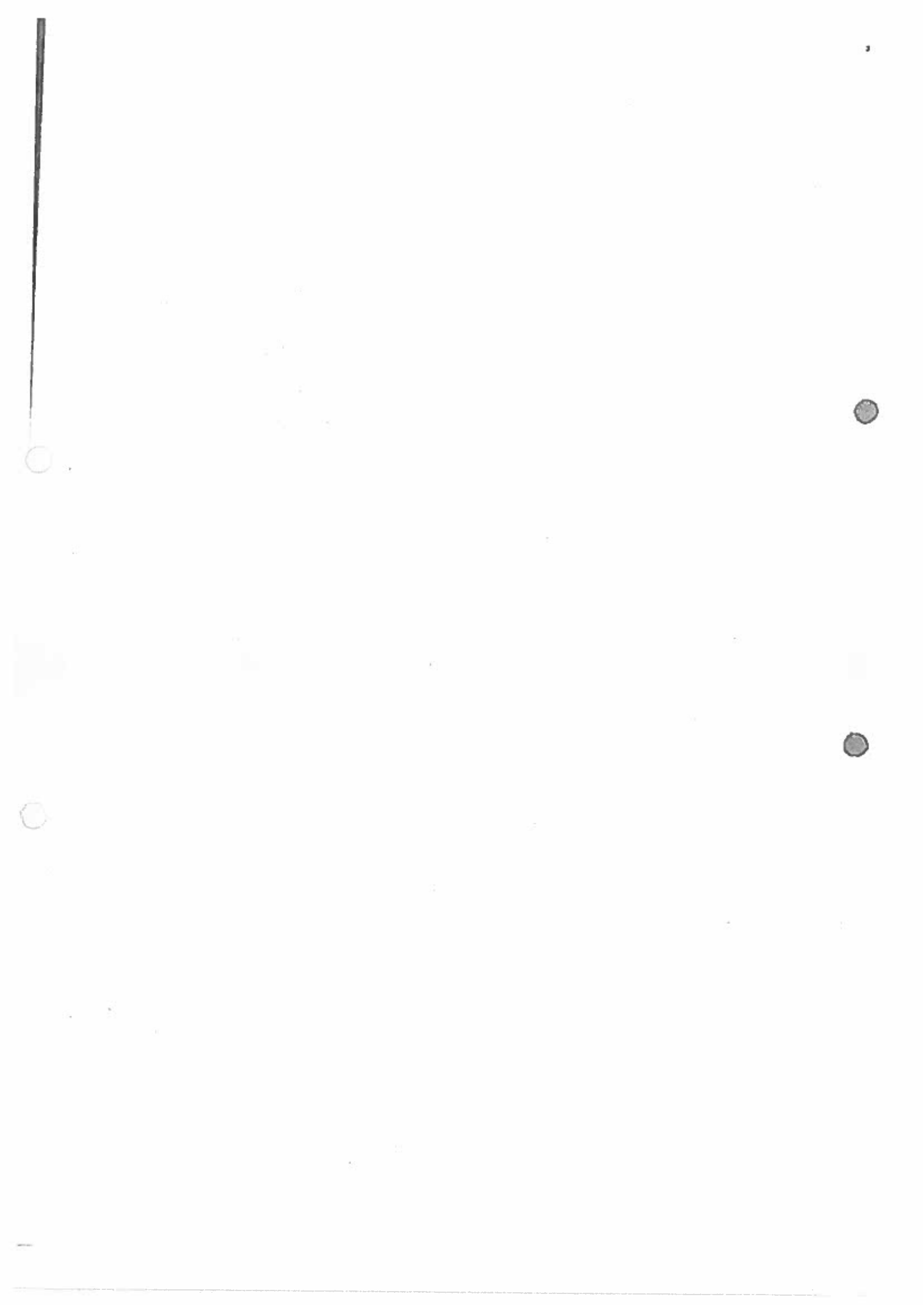
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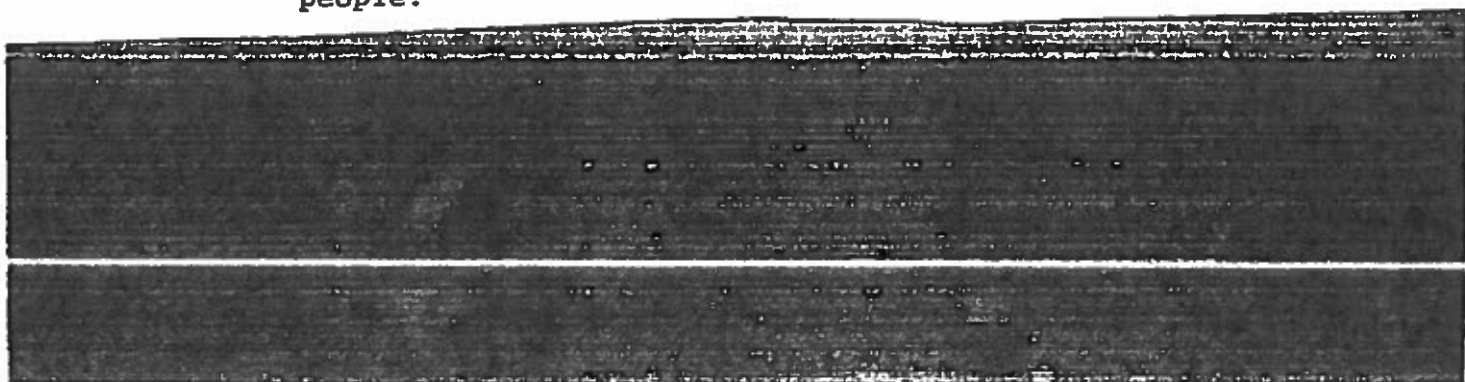
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4. THE CURRENT WELFARE OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE IDENTIFIED

- 4.1 Our first task was to decide how to define welfare for the purposes of our review. We concluded that we needed to make a judgement about how well they are coping as independent adults, or as young people approaching adulthood, or as a young child. In considering their well-being we kept in mind their living conditions, their health, their networks, and their links with family members and important others. We were also interested in how they were coping and the extent to which the local authority was succeeding in discharging its responsibilities as corporate parent. We designed interview questions to explore these and other areas.
- 4.2 The next task was to decide how to meet the young people. We decided that, as a minimum for the interim work, we should aim to speak to each young person, to one important family member, and to one social worker with direct knowledge of them.
- 4.3 We wrote to most of the young people and to those we judged - from the files and from advice from our professional link person - to be important family members. We sent a stamped addressed envelope and paper for a reply, and gave details of evening and day phone numbers. We encouraged them to be accompanied by a friend or representative if they so wished.
- 4.4 We wrote to past and present field social workers and managers, inviting them to contact us with available dates for interview. We told them, too, that they were free to bring a friend or representative. Some chose to come with their senior. We were already in contact with residential social workers through our work on the two named units. Largely as a matter of courtesy, but also to gain useful insights, we met with the director and a member of the senior management team.
- 4.5 In order to deal with the large quantity of information collected, we have created a format that has enabled us to focus on the salient points that emerged from our discussions. This forms the next section of this report. But first, to set the scene about the young people and their families, we provide some information about their legal status and contact with the Council. The brief pictures that we paint below should not be seen as a critique of how the Council has worked with the young people.
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5. THE CURRENT STATE OF THE RESIDENTIAL UNITS

Which homes have we included?

5.1 We have assumed that our brief was to examine the current situation at the two units whose full address was publicised in the press articles.

5.2 How we approached our task

We decided to do the following:

1. Decide the criteria we would apply when judging whether or not the units were out of control.
2. Devise questions to help us explore those criteria.
3. Make a joint visit to familiarise ourselves with both units.
4. Conduct joint interviews with as many young people as were willing to meet us in each unit.
5. Conduct interviews with as many staff as possible. In order to save time we each took responsibility for one unit. This included doing the interviews and follow-up work and preparing material for this report.
6. Attend one staff meeting in order to offer some tentative feedback, check out some anomalies, and enable questions to be asked and comments offered.
7. Consider the comments we had received from other people interviewed in relation to the young people identified in the articles. These included field social workers and middle and senior managers.
8. Read as much as we could of the background material that had been provided to us or that we requested as issues arose during our work.

Criteria applied and questions asked

- 5.3 In defining out of control for the purpose of this investigation we have concluded that it is about staff and residents knowing they are in a bad situation and feeling they are powerless to put things right.
- 5.4 There are two main elements in this. The first is whether staff are harming young people in the home. The second is

whether things are happening that one would expect staff to stop, in their capacity as reasonable parents.

- 5.5 In order to apply this definition we drew up questions that explored people's views about the meaning of out of control, possible warning signs, and difficulties experienced. We asked about the role of the unit; the rules, sanctions and rewards in operation; whether residents and staff felt safe and supported; and what improvements, if any, people would like to see for themselves or others. We asked various other questions and concluded by asking if there were other matters that people wanted to bring to our attention.

Visits and interviews

- 5.6 Our professional link person arranged a familiarisation visit to each unit on 1 December. We were shown round the building, had a brief word with residents who were there, and met with the superintendent and deputy at "B", and the two deputies at "A". We explained that we would welcome the chance to interview as many staff as possible and those residents who were willing to speak to us.
- 5.7 We wish to place on record our gratitude for the kindnesses we received. Staff went out of their way to give us time and make us welcome. When necessary they came in early to be interviewed, or stayed late, or made special arrangements to come in when not on duty. They turned up to help set up the interviews with the young people and seemed to have done all they could to encourage the young people to meet us.
- 5.8 At "B" we interviewed 3 of the 5 main staff members, 3 young people and 1 ex-resident. At "A" we interviewed 7 of the 9 main staff members and 6 young people.

Drawing the information together

- 5.9 When we asked staff to explain what they meant by out of control, we found an extremely high level of agreement about what that meant for their unit. For them, the place would be out of control if:
- * staff abused young people
 - * young people abused one another
 - * people felt physically and/or emotionally unsafe
 - * staff and young people were not listening to one another
 - * there were no set rules
 - * young people did what they want, regardless of what staff were saying
 - * staff did not know where the young people were

- * young people were staying away constantly
- * staff could not deal with visitors who became difficult
- * staff and young people did not mix together
- * the behaviour of young people was deteriorating and that was having a negative effect on others
- * drugs and alcohol were in use.

5.10 We have converted these signs of a unit being out of control into some of the key positive elements that we would hope to find in a residential unit for young people. They do not pretend for one moment to be exhaustive, but we have found them useful in sorting out what we have seen and heard.

5.11 These elements are:

1. A safe physical environment
2. A feeling of safety
3. Checks and balances.

5.12 We deal with points 1. and 2. above separately for each unit. We then deal with point 3. in relation to both units.

A safe physical environment - Unit "A"

a. Doors and windows

5.13 Alarms were fitted to the two external fire doors last summer, some 18 months after the initial request from staff. The first system broke down after 2 days. The doors were then alarmed to the Chubb system and have not been used much as entry points since then.

5.14 Those still intent on entering moved on to other means, notably the window of the bathroom on the second floor and the back basement door. The staff had requested that a metal grille be inserted into the window frame. This has not happened but the window is now being boarded up. The back basement door is not alarmed; it is fitted with two internal bolts but no key.

5.15 Immediately after the press articles were published work was put in progress to secure most of the window frames and add locks to them.

b. Internal communication between staff

5.16 Two staff are on duty at a time. The usual arrangement at

night time is that the more experienced sleeps downstairs while the other uses the sleeping-in room on the second floor. There is no means of communicating between the two. Because of intruders, the staff asked for a phone to be installed upstairs so that they could link up with the person sleeping downstairs, and with the ground-floor office, and so that the police could be called from any of the three rooms.

5.17 Six months later an engineer had confirmed that such a system existed and senior management had approved the expenditure. Eighteen months later a socket was installed. This was welcomed although not what had been requested. The phone was used without authorisation by residents and an ex-worker and, as a result, disconnection was threatened by the financial director.

5.18 There is still no means of communication between the sleeping-in rooms.

5.19 Staff have proposed in the past that they have personal alarms but it is not clear whether this has been pursued beyond a staff meeting. They continue to think this would be a good idea.

c. The front of the unit

5.20 The lounge looks out onto the front drive and small garden, set back a little from the busy road. The lounge has large windows and has, in the past, been an entry point for break-ins, resulting in the loss of a television and video. As a result the television is locked in the office until the lounge is opened in the evening.

5.21 Staff have pressed for curtains for the lower part of the windows. Net curtains were delivered the day after the press articles.

d. General maintenance

5.22 One main concern is that some of the electric light switches are unsafe. The other is the state of the central heating. It keeps going wrong, gets blocked, and the radiators leak, mainly into the laundry room in the basement. Staff have been told that this will be attended to during the refurbishing work that is in progress. Their worry is the uncertainty about how long the work will take and how they will manage if the heating system breaks down during the rest of winter.

e. The refurbishing work

5.23 This work had begun before we started our review in late

November. It is a major project, much greater than the painting and decorating job that some staff had thought would happen. It is something of an understatement to say that the work was long overdue.

- 5.24 When we first visited "A", nothing could have prepared us fully for what we encountered inside. We were devastated to find that young people were living, and staff working, in what we can perhaps best describe as a dump. It is not total delapidation throughout. The lounge has a newish suite and heavy curtains, and some of the young people have worked hard to make their own rooms a little better than the rest of the building though some of the rooms that we saw were cheerless and poorly furnished and decorated.
- 5.25 For years the order of the day has been peeling plaster; wallpaper and paint that bears layers of grease and grime; stained and threadbare carpets; bare and rusting pipes; graffiti of residents long since gone; light bulbs without shades; chairs and a sofa in the staff/meeting room that are dirty and in tatters; and toilets and bathrooms with broken or missing toilet roll holders, gaping holes in the walls where appliances have once been secured, and no mirror or waste bin.
- 5.26 The basement, which perhaps once served as the main communal area, is bleak and unhomely. There is no dining area large enough for young people and staff; the kitchen has a round table but only one or two chairs. The laundry room has streams of peeling plaster hanging from the ceiling and only one washer and drier work properly. What used to be the dining room - and has potential as a large activity room - has a worn carpet, no light shades and a couple of pieces of junk furniture.
- 5.27 When we got to the top floor we found that the dump became a building site also. Planks of wood, doors and an old bed are propped up against the walls. The atmosphere is dusty. Downstairs, the front door has tended to be ajar or wide open during our latter visits, presumably because of the constant movement of the workmen to and from their trucks in the front drive and the road.
- 5.28 Regulation 7(2)(b) of the Children's Homes Regulations 1991 requires a home to be maintained in a good state of structural repair, to be clean, and to be reasonably decorated and maintained. Until the refurbishing is complete we are sure that the Council is in breach of this legal requirement, not least because we understand that the money has been allocated specifically to bring the unit up to registration standards.
- 5.29 We are not sure what advice, if any, has been sought from the legal department about retaining the unit as a home and work place while the refurbishing is in progress. We would recommend that any alternative proposals should not be

authorised without proper consultation first with the young people and staff. The impression we gained is that they would wish to stay together as a group if they are decanted.

A feeling of safety - Unit "A"

a. Role of the unit

- 5.30 Most of the staff describe "A" as a semi-independent unit. Their role is to prepare older adolescents for life in the outside world. It is to equip them with the social, emotional and physical skills to survive. Part of this job is to open, re-open or maintain links with families and networks.
- 5.31 Other staff say that many of the young people who come to the unit are unable to cope with any degree of independence and so they, the staff, are unsure quite what is the purpose of the unit.
- 5.32 The accommodation includes 2 flats with their own kitchen and bathroom. Some of the young people have to plan, buy and cook their own food each day, as well as pursuing their school studies or doing a work experience course. Those seem to us to be quite heavy demands for young people of their age.
- 5.33 The problem seems to be that "A" was a children's home that has gradually been extended into a hostel. This point was put to us by several staff, including managers. The lack of consensus about its purpose affects the way the unit operates.

b. A framework of reasonable discipline and order

- 5.34 Drugs and alcohol Without exception, everyone says that drugs and alcohol are not allowed on the premises. They are clear that the police will be called, and invited to search the premises, if staff have strong grounds for suspecting possession of drugs. We were told that this happened last month and otherwise arises about twice a year.
- 5.35 Staff said that it was a problem when young people came in smelling of drugs but denied that they had been using them. We have heard indirectly that young people have said that at times the unit has smelt of drugs but that no action was taken.
- 5.36 Overnight visitors are allowed if advance notice has been given, so that the request can be approved by the field social worker and someone with parental responsibility for the guest. We are not clear whether permission needs to be sought, too, from parents of the young residents but there

would seem to be an anomaly here if that is not the case. No friends of the opposite sex are supposed to stay and, on the whole, this is not a problem with the present group of residents. Some of the staff said it was beginning to be a problem some while ago but that the residents were hassled to stop, and did so.

5.37 It seems clear that there were serious problems in the past, and that staff were aware of men/boyfriends staying over but felt powerless to deal with it. The lack of security made their job a nightmare: short of staying awake all night they felt they could do little except turf out the men/boyfriends, knowing that within minutes they would be back through one of several unsecured doors or windows.

5.38 Sexuality The impression we have formed is that there is no agreed approach to how staff will approach the young people's sexual activity in and outside the home. There is confusion also about whether the ban on overnight visits from boy or girlfriends applies equally to those deemed mature enough to live in one of the flats. The argument was made that a young woman of a similar age, and in their own private or council flat, might well have a boyfriend staying over.

5.39 Staff appear to make their own judgements in individual cases. So, for example, the rule was overlooked for an 18 year old resident who denied having her boyfriend staying in her flat, but the staff member took care to satisfy herself that the relationship was what the young person wanted and could cope with, and ensured that she got advice about safe sex.

5.40 Time for being in at night Staff and young people gave different responses to this question. There was agreement that extensions can be agreed with staff, and that latecomers will be reported to the police as missing. The way of dealing afterwards with those who stay out all night seems to vary rather than being guided by an agreed approach.

c. Rules about daily living

5.41 These are intended to provide a structure to the young people's lives and to encourage them to be out at school or college, or be working or on a YTS scheme. They are about the use of the kitchen and lounge and access to the office phone. We heard nothing to suggest there are worries about these rules.

5.42 We do not consider that the phone arrangements comply with Regulation 7(5) which requires that a pay telephone is available in a setting where it is possible to make and receive phone calls in private.

d. Sanctions and rewards

- 5.43 Staff who commented said that ways of reinforcing achievement include allowing young people extra money to go to the cinema or swimming at the weekend or taking them out for an occasional treat.
- 5.44 The most effective sanction - and perhaps for that reason remarked on as unfair by several of the young people - was to threaten to hold back some of their personal allowance for a few hours or until the next day. Visitors who misbehave can be banned for the evening or until the next staff meeting. Misbehaviour here includes threatening other residents or staff, going into others' rooms, or taking or eating food belonging to the residents.
- 5.45 We were told that young people are sometimes banned from making phone calls to friends in the evening as a sanction. Travel passes can be reduced from weekly to daily ones to deter absence from school or work. And those deemed independent enough to have a weekly food allowance might find that reduced if they have taken the house food that belongs to the rest of the residents or if, as happened late last year, the money is spent on drugs.
- 5.46 Despite all that is listed above, there is a feeling of uncertainty among staff about what sanctions - if any - they can apply. Some of their responses were at variance with the unit's statement of purpose. It is not quite clear whether the frustration they feel is because they have too limited a range at their disposal, or that they don't work, or that they don't think they should be using them, or that there is no clear guidance or agreement about when and how best to use them. We think it is probably a mixture of all this, and more besides.
- 5.47 One of the things that remain to be explored is the extent to which young people are involved in discussions about both rewards and sanctions.

e. Planning for individuals

- 5.48 Part of feeling safe is young people and staff being clear about plans for individual children. This is about knowing what is to happen, and why and how and when. We did not have time to explore this matter in any depth. We just asked to see the file of any one young person so we could get a feel for the sort of recording being done.
- 5.49 An incident sheet had nothing entered in the section headed action, and the care plan agreement form had many gaps. It did not specify what work was to be done and gave no indication of time scales or the role of field and residential staff.

5.50 Young people were generally unclear about the different tasks of field and residential workers. On the whole the field worker was seen as someone who was around for review meetings and court cases and did - or did not - get you the iron you needed.

5.51 A real concern for staff is the question of aftercare. There is a clear commitment to do this work because they have seen young people move on and fail to cope and they feel a continuing sense of responsibility for the young people. The problem is how to fit it in, in terms of sheer time and safety. The more experienced worry about leaving new staff to cope alone while they pop out to make an evening visit. Staff know that they are expected to do aftercare work but feel that not enough recognition has been given of the extra time needed, and the skills and stresses involved.

5.52 In relation to both aftercare and work done before leaving, there seemed to be no agreed list of survival skills that staff were working their way through with individual young people.

f. Anti-racist practice

5.53 At first it seemed that staff and young people felt that there was a positive and informed approach to anti-racist practice, with examples given of how racist remarks had been challenged and support offered.

5.54 When one young person told us that she had not felt able to raise a racist remark with staff we checked this out. We then picked up worries among staff about their own inability to deal with racism and their lack of confidence that managers - not just in the unit - were any better equipped than they were. Training in anti-racist practice had been requested during supervision but not provided.

5.55 The staff group is predominantly black, and so are the young people. This raises two immediate issues, and both were commented on. The first is the over-representation of black young people in relation to the total population of young people in the borough for those being looked after, in general, and for those in residential provision, in particular. The second is the lack of black workers in the management teams in and above the unit.

g. Respect for property

5.56 At least 3 of the young people had had personal items stolen and were disgruntled about the lack of help received to try to replace them. Staff said that they felt the same about damage or loss of their property. It seems that no insurance cover against loss can be found and that a

request has to be made to the Council for an ex-gratia payment. There was a sense that claims should be pursued, and sometimes were, but that you gradually learnt that you would need to be extremely persistent in chasing up progress and might well end up fighting a losing battle.

- 5.57 It is a matter of concern that this prevails in a unit where staff are working hard to build up young people's self-esteem and respect. The Council needs to ensure that young people can leave their property in safety in their own home and that, if it lost or stolen, there are effective remedies that those with parental responsibility in the community would pursue for children living in their care.

h. Direction and support

- 5.58 Staff commented on the strengths within their group. They feel part of a creative team and recent team-building training has contributed to this positive feel. They have been caring, as usual, for some of the most challenging young people in the borough. They feel that their reputation for doing this successfully is deserved. But forces are in play to affect this buoyant and optimistic mood.
- 5.59 They have been without a manager for 5 months, and the recent third attempt to recruit did not succeed. One of the deputies is about to go on extended leave. Almost without exception staff expressed their confidence in the increased support and communication from the new management at the neighbourhood office. But there is a sense that no-one outside the unit is really in tune with what is going on.
- 5.60 There are new staff, and an expressed concern about an over-reliance on agency staff. In the past year one agency worker behaved inappropriately towards a young woman and suggested using petty cash money to buy drugs; another took no action when one of the residents shoplifted in her presence; an ex-worker is alleged to have sold drugs to the residents and to have had a relationship with one of them.
- 5.61 All this is worrying for staff because it is wrong in itself, it is wrong that the young people are exposed to it, and it leaves staff feeling that it shakes the confidence of young people in the rest of them. It contributes to the feeling of unsafety that is around.
- 5.62 Supervision is not part of life at "A". A useful recording form has been devised, and there was a general feel that the deputies received and gave supervision. However, when pressed, staff could either remember their last - and distant and only - formal session, or found it difficult remembering having had any. Meetings were remembered, but not ones where they were clear that the purpose was formal

supervision of their work.

- 5.63 Most staff said they had had a good range of training courses so far, although some have not had Children Act training and new staff seem to have had none. What most would like is training on how to deal with the specific problems that are part of daily life in the unit. Other requests were for courses in how to cope with violence, how to counsel young people, and anti-racist practice.
- 5.64 Frustration is felt about levels of pay. Staff feel that their job with difficult young people is not reflected in either their pay or the grades that "80" carries. They compare themselves as poorly treated when compared with the newer family centres or with workers in neighbouring boroughs. They commented that the Council is training people it then loses to other areas, and that discussions on regrading are mentioned but don't seem to lead anywhere.

i. Feeling at ease with one another

- 5.65 Various issues fit under this umbrella. One is about the mix of residents and the appropriateness of referrals. There is only one young man in the resident group. He came for weekend respite care, from an all-boy boarding school, but has been living at "A" since leaving school in the summer. He is among a group of young women who are much more worldly-wise than he is. He says he gets on with them but, when asked what more he would like to tell us, he asked how he could get a transfer to a place with other boys. When he first came there were two other young men, but it was known that they would soon be moving to their own flat.
- 5.66 This situation highlights the importance of those making decisions about placement giving high regard to future plans for a unit including, in this case, the planned move of other residents, the planned refurbishment, and the planned limitation of new referrals while this work was completed.
- 5.67 Another matter relates to the dearth of opportunities for communal activities. We have heard indirectly of the young people commenting on the boredom of life in the unit and of the lack of organised outings. Staff told us how, on arrival, they had been shocked by the absence of games, a video, and educational things for the young people. The obvious difficulty was how to engage with a group when there were no resources to help with that.
- 5.68 It seems that games have been stolen and not replaced, or replaced several times and then abandoned when lost again. Thought has been given to acquiring some games equipment for the large, unused room in the basement but nothing tangible has been achieved. Some staff are creative in encouraging group activities, such as sewing and cooking,

but their job is made difficult by the lack of facilities.

5.69 Another relates to the state of the building. Some young people said they were ashamed to have people see where they lived, and that friends and relatives sometimes did not or would not visit on account of that. Staff confirmed this view. They added that a problem when people did visit was the lack of privacy and comfort. If other residents were watching television in the lounge the only options were bedrooms or the bare basement room.

j. Press publicity

5.70 We were told that young people felt far from safe when the press articles were published. There were two sides to this. First, the publication of the address of their home made some of them scared about going out and in. They were confronted on several occasions by strangers trying to gain entry, on the pretext of needing to use the phone or some other excuse. Television cameras arrived. A man was found on the fire escape in the early hours of the following day.

5.71 Second, the young people became divided as a group. The staff had talked with them about the first article and, initially, they were fine about it. Later in the evening those who had known the young people in the articles who had lived at "A" began to feel angry that their home, and by implication themselves, had been brought into disrepute. They wanted to blame someone. They targeted the two residents whose behaviour at the time gave most cause for concern and they in turn became distressed, isolated and frightened. The matter was resolved by one of the young women moving temporarily to another unit. She was relieved to go once she had been assured that she could return after a few days.

A safe physical environment - Unit "B"

5.72 Our first experience at our first visit to "B" gave cause for concern for security. Access to the front door is via steps from a narrow pavement on a busy main road. The door was open. Later we were told by slightly embarrassed staff that despite all that had happened and all the warnings the young people often left the door on the latch. On 12 December we wrote to the director about this and about the poor security on the basement front door. He replied on 15 December and we were disappointed to find that the job was not completed until 4 January.

5.73 The first office had been forcibly entered from a window. The assumption was that the house had been approached from the waste land at the back of the house. In the office there was a supermarket trolley that could only have been brought in at first floor level. The staff assumed this was

to move a safe that contained little or no valuables. The incident provided a graphic illustration of the need for security.

- 5.74 The far more precious cargo of "B" are the often vulnerable young people who are resident and the residential workers who serve them. In our interviews, staff and young people told us that they did not feel safe and at times felt frighteningly unsafe. "B" consists entirely of flats and each of their front doors has a double locking system. One resident remarked that they felt safe within their flat but you did not know what you might come across once outside. It was almost as though the flat doors opened onto a main road rather than the inside of a house. The carelessness or callousness of just one resident could make the house very insecure.
- 5.75 The staff quarters are in the basement although the first floor office is sometimes used in the evening. The staff are not able to see the comings and goings of residents and visitors. Even if they were in a better physical position there is only one person on duty at one time and they will not necessarily be in the house.
- 5.76 The press articles reported an incident where a resident was in difficulties with visitors. They went to wake the person on duty who did not respond. There are no means of communicating between the staff quarters and the flats. If there are difficulties at night the member of staff on duty has to visit the flat and deal with the situation. This has led to some frightening confrontations with unwelcome visitors. Staff felt that they could deal with almost all young people even when they were challenging and confrontational. Difficulties arose with the strangers they found on the premises. Although they were unknown to staff they were invited in by residents. In one case many of them were children who were absent from other Islington children's homes.
- 5.77 If the unit was not about to close we would be likely to make recommendations in our final report about wholesale improvements in security and the use of expert advice to make the place safe without turning it into Fort Knox. We would certainly have drawn attention to inadequate levels of staffing. At one time the unit had two staff per shift and that at a time when the young people referred to "B" were far less challenging. As it is we are likely to content ourselves with it serving as a contra-indicator of a safe physical environment.

A feeling of safety - Unit "B"

a. Role of the unit

- 5.78 The staff are very clear that "B" is not a children's home.

They believe it is a hostel to prepare young people for independent living. The staff see themselves as advisers, facilitators, encouragers and responsible adults. A difficult part of their task is to enforce the standards required for young people to live at "B". They regard themselves as professional workers although that term allows a wide interpretation of the role.

- 5.79 Whether by design or coincidence the residential workers are the most experienced team in Islington. Field workers, managerial staff and young people referred to them with respect and affection. The support offered to young people is above minimum standards, but the unit is not geared to deal with particularly disruptive or vulnerable young people.
- 5.80 To be suitable for "B", young people need to be able to cope, rather quickly, with the freedom and isolation of caring for themselves with a bit more support than they will receive when Islington offers them a flat from the adolescent quota. When the young people move to their flat and formally out of the care system staff at "B" will assist them in moving and visit them to help settle in. Former residents often ring or call at the unit seeking advice and guidance. Some feel that they cannot do it too often or for too long, without it being thought that they were not coping with independent living.
- 5.81 There appears to be a policy disagreement between managerial staff and the staff at "B" as to whether organising communal activities is desirable. The staff would be happy to advise individuals on entertainment but would see communal activities as suited to a children's home and not a preparation for independent living.
- 5.82 Vital aftercare work has received a severe jolt with the dismissal of a deputy for inappropriate behaviour when visiting ex-residents. Less obvious than the shocking breach of trust to young people is the breach between workers. They place a high value on their team effort, and on mutual trust and support. It is difficult to see how the unit could function without such mutual trust. The dismissal of the deputy and the subsequent enquiry did little for staff morale.
- b. A framework of reasonable discipline and order
- 5.83 Drugs and alcohol etc. As at unit "A", young people were clear that neither drugs nor alcohol were allowed on the premises. They added animals to the banned list and not admitting people whom the staff had banned.
- 5.84 Overnight visitors The rules allow residents to have overnight visitors providing staff are given advanced notice. The staff told us that they require notice for fire

safety. There was no ban on overnight stays by boyfriends or girlfriends. They were shortly to move into their own accommodation and this simulated the conditions they would have there. The residential staff did make judgements: if, for instance, a young woman was entertaining a much older man they might attempt to dissuade her from an inappropriate relationship.

- 5.85 There is a policy of not allowing boyfriends or girlfriends to take up residence. Some of them did, however, and to the resentment of other residents. This was particularly true for one resident in shared accommodation who would come across another resident's boyfriend dressed only in his boxer shorts. In one case staff evicted several young strangers who were sleeping in one of the flats. It was not clear at what point stopping a few nights turned into taking up residence.
- 5.86 One suggestion was that if a resident and their guest were behaving well apart from breaching the rule on moving in, staff would act more slowly than in cases where they moved in and behaved badly. Related to this are the problems of young people finding themselves sharing with someone with whom they do not get along.
- 5.87 For reasons similar to "A" the role of bedroom police officer is particularly difficult. The staff escorted strangers from the premises but they came back once the staff returned to their quarters.
- 5.88 Time for being in at night was not relevant to "B" and young people might spend days away with family and friends. They were expected - but not required - to inform staff of their absence.

c. Rules about daily living

- 5.89 To qualify to come to "B" young people had to have a source of income and pay rent for their accommodation. The source of income might be an educational allowance, a YTS scheme or benefit. Staff would encourage orderly living such as signing on or seeking work or educational opportunities. The rules required young people to keep their flats reasonably tidy and hygienic and to feed and look after themselves. There were not communal feeding facilities. In the case of a flat used for a mother and baby there was expectation of reasonable child care.
- 5.90 Some of these expectations are difficult to realise. The department have set the rent of the flats at a thoroughly unrealistic level. The staff find it difficult to remember when the rent was last adjusted. Even at this minimum level it is difficult to enforce. This is due both to a lack of sanctions and the young people's poverty. There is a tension between the need to prepare young people for the

difficulties they will experience in moving to a flat and leaving care and the current responsibility of care. An ad hoc system of payments and tins of soup bridge the gap.

- 5.91 Regulations 6 and 7 of the Children Act call for provision of private meeting arrangements and a pay phone where residents can receive and make calls in private. The young people's flats may cover the requirement for private meeting arrangements. The pay phone in the hall does not seem to conform.

d. Sanctions and rewards

- 5.92 There are few, if any, sanctions or rewards at "B". The ultimate sanction, which staff use is requiring the young person to leave. This is a difficult choice because unless it involves an accelerated allocation of a flat there are few choices other than bed and breakfast accommodation. We cannot imagine how this could ever meet the needs of young people. This was readily acknowledged by senior management. It points to the need to bring to bear all the resources that the department can muster.

- 5.93 One young person, when asked what happened if you break the rules, said that you get a telling off from a member of staff and that was all right because they do not make you feel like a child. In addition to the residential workers' praise or censure, the family and the field social worker are involved in advising young people when their behaviour is unacceptable.

e. Planning for individuals

- 5.94 The information on residents has, until recently, been minimal. The staff thought this to be in keeping with the nature of the institution. Log books would record incidents but their main purpose was as information for other shifts. Because of difficulties in the recent disciplinary case, management now require a record of every outreach visit to former residents.
- 5.95 A new contract document is signed by the young person, a residential worker and their social worker before they take up residence. We looked at one filled in before the strike. It was a pro forma with only a few of the headings ticked. It is certainly useful to have a document that reminds young people of their responsibilities and entitlements but it does not come near to a plan for an individual.
- 5.96 Staff said that the next development would have been individual files on each resident. It was not clear whether that would involve individual plans. Without an individual plan it is difficult to see how field and residential workers, the young person and their family can unite in

efforts to achieve objectives. The ratio of 10 young people to 1 residential worker at any one time does not assist in achieving plans.

5.97 Aftercare work for former residents is included in the unit's statement of purpose. The way it is implemented seems to stem from the initiative of individuals and the team. The main guidance mentioned was the new procedure for logging all visits and for not making visits alone. Apart from the debacle with the sacked deputy, the Council has reason to be grateful for the time and effort devoted to this work. The length of time and number of visits made to young people on leaving "B" varies with how well they are coping. It would typically vary from 3 to 6 months.

5.98 Current practice needs to be checked against Regulations 15, 16, 17 of the Children Act.

f. Anti-racist practice

5.99 Two adverse comments we heard were of a visitor questioning the posters illustrating black leaders and of one black young person being criticised by others about their music. On the whole, young people did not see racism as an issue in the unit. The staff make-up is of a black female acting superintendent, two white female deputies and a black male agency worker. As with unit "A", black young people and in particular black young females are over represented. The staffing in terms of gender and seniority provides a better model.

g. Respect for property

5. Workers told us that previous residents were distressed
100 when their property was stolen. A current resident was angry that someone had stolen her television and that no-one appeared to be able to do anything about it. The young people's very limited resources make the loss of property much harder to bear.

h. Direction and support

5. Staff look towards one another for their main support,
101 including adverse criticism and guidance. In the past that was because that was what they wanted to do and because they felt they were getting little support or direction from elsewhere. A manager told us that this could have been because in the past there had been a constant high level of vacancies and turnover. There is high praise for the support currently offered by the manager and social service officer at the neighbourhood office. One worker said it was hard to put into words the relief they felt to speak to someone who believed what they were saying. The practical

help that then followed made a world of difference to how they did their job. The strong emphasis was not, surprisingly, on the practical help but on being believed.

5. The superintendent carried out supervision on a collective
102 basis. If the unit were to continue this would have switched to include one to one supervision. The staff would have needed convincing since they claimed that collective supervision supported rather than inhibited them.

5. The direction for the unit is closure as part of the
103 adolescent strategy and as a response to a reduced budget. The closure provides an ideal opportunity to reflect on both policy and practice issues. The main issue of the imminent closure is the anxiety caused to young people and the workers. Young people want a speedy resolution of flat allocation. Workers want a resolution of what is to happen to them, especially if people say they are a particularly valuable asset in child care in Islington.

i. Feeling at ease with one another

5. "B" does not pretend to provide communal activities. The
104 nature of the group constantly changes as people leave and arrive. The staff make judgements about what if any initiative they take. One set of young people formed a women's group that the staff facilitated. Some young people are solitary while others develop widespread friendships. If "B" were to continue there would be a lively debate between the managers of the home and their seniors about the appropriateness of communal activities.

5. One area that bridges that difference would be training in
104 building good support networks and that could start in the unit. One of the young people said that this went on informally. She said that many of them had spent a long time in care. They had an empathy with others who had done the same. If someone knocked on the door in the early hours wanting to talk she said that you let them in.

5.105 The staff were obviously at ease with one another.

j. Press publicity

5. Unlike "A", the staff of "B" were more shocked than the
106 residents with the publishing of the press articles. This was because one of their colleagues appeared to have breached the confidentiality of the young people's lives. One person added that if the publicity resulted in things getting done then some good would have been done. The staff said that the skill and dignity with which the young people conducted themselves after the publication was impressive and they told them so. No one enjoyed the address of their home being given out.

Checks and balances for both units

a. Information about the units

5. We were surprised to hear field workers say that they had
107 not visited the long-stay units, and so felt limited in
their knowledge of how appropriate or otherwise they would
be for a particular young person. They had varied knowledge
of what both units offered. Social workers need to
familiarise themselves with the resources available for
their work, for how else can they make the judgements that
are required. But responsibility rests, too, with the
residential unit to ensure that information is available,
and that the information reflects accurately the service on
offer.
5. In line with Regulation 4, there is now a formal statement
108 of purpose available for each unit. But the criteria for
admission seem to be rather too vague to be helpful for
those trying to make choices about placement. We do not
consider, for example, that the statement indicates clearly
enough what it is about "A" that would make it the positive
choice for a young person, as opposed to a foster placement
or other unit in or out of the borough.
5. It would be to the advantage of young people, their
109 families, the staff, members of the resource panel and
elected members to have a well-presented publication
describing each of the Council's homes, hostels and
centres. Models are available elsewhere.

b. Access to seniors

5. A recurring theme in our interviews with staff was the
110 persistent frustration they have felt in recent years at
their lack of progress in improving security in particular,
and repairs and decorations in general. We were told of new
staff who would come in and ask questions about why things
were not getting done, and then would gradually stop asking
the questions because they realised they could not be
answered. So great was the frustration of not being able to
produce the goods, it seems, that weekly staff meetings at
"A" were reduced to fortnightly to avoid the anguish of
having to report continually of no progress.
5. We have not been able to check out what, if anything, is
111 recorded about the unit manager's attempts to move things
on. But we were struck by the passion with which so many
staff spoke about attempts to put things right.
5. It seems to us that workers should have access to those
112 higher up the management system if they feel that the normal
line-management channel is not effective enough in pressing
the needs of young people. They need to be enabled and

encouraged to do this without fear of reprimand from either the line manager who has not resolved the problem or the person higher up whom they have approached.

c. The role of elected members

5. 113 The principal roles for elected members are setting or agreeing standards, setting or agreeing what the organisation has to achieve, monitoring standards and achievements, allocating resources, and being clear about when resources are depleted and accepting responsibility for that. Some members will have a more detailed role in agreeing such things as secure accommodation.
5. 114 It is tempting to suggest that members should involve themselves in more detail. We would like to imagine that if elected members had seen the shocking state of disrepair at "A", or had noticed a three-month wait for a simple repair at "B", they would have demanded a remedy. It is possible to speculate that member involvement in the more controversial referrals to both units would have led to better outcomes.
5. 115 Detailed member involvement is not going to happen, because the organisation's call on members' time is over-subscribed. In a large and complex organisation it is, anyway, inappropriate. Systems are emerging - such as the inspection reports - that do facilitate monitoring by elected members. The organisation is likely to watch with interest whether members use this tool or whether it becomes another wadge of papers that serves only to conform to legal requirements. Over the past thirteen months the inspection reports on "A" have highlighted the grim physical conditions and the problems over drugs, security and intruders.
5. 116 While children are looked after by the local authority members become the corporate parent for each child. One way of realising the responsibility they share with the young person and their family is to require information that shows how their children are doing in totality, what the trends are, and how they compare with like areas. Elected members and managers can come to know best practice not just by theoretical reference but by coming to know areas within the borough where things work well. Totality includes not just social care but health and education and all that goes into supporting the development of the young.
5. 117 Members could contribute directly to improving staff morale by creating a legend of appreciation of the child care service and of the efforts of individual staff and teams. During our review feelings have been expressed at all levels that this may not be the case. Put at its strongest, it was suggested that social services is a cinderella service and that residential child care is a cinderella

within that.

5. If every elected member visited every unit then people's 118 homes would turn into zoos. We were conscious of the care we had to take to minimise our visits becoming an intrusion. Ward members, however, could take a friendly interest in homes and units on their patch without cutting across managerial responsibilities. Similarly, members with special interest or expertise in child care provision could help develop the informal networks that young people need when preparing for independence.

5. This two-fold approach would mean that members would be 119 responsible collectively for a set of demanding strategies at the top while being responsible individually for emotional support at the level of service provision.

5. Section 27 of the Children Act requires local authority 120 departments to play ball with one another in developing and delivering services. Members, in conjunction with the Chief Executive, have a crucial role in ensuring that the letter and the spirit of this requirement breathes through practice. It should do so, anyway, between housing and social services, given that both are combined in one department.

d. Complaints

5. When we asked young people how they would raise a complaint 121 they gave a range of pragmatic answers: generally they would seek help from one another or tell the staff. Asked about complaints about staff, they said they didn't have any or they would tell some other member of staff. They were unaware of their entitlement under the Children Act because no-one had told them. Neither staff nor young people could name the authority's designated complaints' officer. No-one had told them that either. They expressed surprise that one might exist. Although technically someone has taken responsibility for the duty it appears to be an add-on following the post not being filled after the departure of the person charged with getting the system going.

5. The person and the procedure, and publicised information 122 about them both, are not just a polite addition to a customer awareness policy. They are a legal requirement under sections 24, 26 and 29 of the Children Act. There is little equality of power between young people who are looked after and those who are responsible for their care. Members and managers have been alerted to enough serious abuse to justify the need for a well-publicised procedure that the young people understand, trust and feel safe in using. It is a matter of concern that this lags far behind the spirit and the letter of legislation implemented 18 months ago.

6. INTERIM OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE YOUNG PEOPLE

6.1 The young people and the families that we met or heard of differ from one another in many ways - in age, race, family size, education, job prospects and opportunities. They are but a tiny proportion of those who come into contact with the Council each year. As the review progresses it may be possible to tease out how common or otherwise are their experiences when compared with other young people and families in the borough. More detailed analysis of the case files than has been possible by this stage will round out the information available at present. For now we make the following observations, based on information from the young people, relatives and social workers we have met so far.

Abuse

- 6.2 All eight young people have been abused physically, sexually, or both physically and sexually. Some of the abuse occurred while they were in the care of their parents. Others have been abused sexually for long periods whilst in the care of the local authority, and some of this did not come to light until they had left care. Half of them have been in relationships with older men which social workers had considered abusive and had tried to divert them from.
- 6.3 Two of these young people were severely abused physically by other young people in care. One of them was also abused sexually by young people in a different children's home. Since s/he left care s/he has been abused verbally in public by the young person inflicted physical abuse when they lived at the same children's home.
- 6.4 It is striking how little specialist counselling seems to have been provided for the young people, and how ill equipped social workers feel to provide that themselves. A recurring comment from field social workers was that they had little expertise in child care work and that the requirement to be generic workers was unlikely to change that. Residential staff put training in counselling as one of their priorities; some felt they were doing it but weren't confident that they were doing it properly.
- 6.5 Some sort of specialist counselling had been recommended at some stage in five of the cases. In one, the young person was assessed by various agencies as in need of psychiatric help but it seems not to have been provided. Their mother says that now, eight years later, the young person is receiving psychiatric help for the same things that s/he was doing as a young teenager, including cutting themselves with a kitchen knife.
- 6.6 In another, the mother said that a little counselling was

provided, and it was excellent, but it did not continue for long enough or frequently enough to have an impact. Another proposal, for group work for the child, was not followed up when the family moved home and the case was not allocated to a new social worker.

- 6.7 In the third case a long break in child guidance work left the child's carer in difficulties dealing with the behaviour that she knew stemmed from the abuse the young person had suffered.
- 6.8 In the fourth case counselling was delayed because of several uncertainties, including how long a placement would last. It resulted in a long delay which parents found hard to understand or accept. They, too, felt that their need for some sort of help with what they had suffered had been overlooked.
- 6.9 In the other case, a recommendation of the child protection conference that counselling be provided was not pursued either then or when the case was allocated shortly afterwards. That young person had had some counselling previously; she had not got on with the counsellor and the sessions seemed to have lapsed.
- 6.10 This point was taken up by an older person who had recently been in the Council's care. When s/he pressed for counselling, and was offered it, s/he was unwilling to have a record kept of the contact and conversations. The sessions did not proceed and s/he was not offered an alternative.

Housing

- 6.11 Three of the young people are homeless. Two of these are living without bedroom space at their parents' home. When we sat on the settee in one of these homes we discovered that we were also sitting on the young person's bed and bedding. The family live in a two-bedroom flat, with one bedroom used by the mother and her partner and the other by the other children. The young person has nowhere private for their belongings. At the other home, a one-bedroom flat, the young person also sleeps on the settee.
- 6.12 The third young person lost their shared bedsit when, several weeks ago, s/he finished with the partner that the High Court had authorised them to live with. As we understand it, the three young people are entitled to priority housing under the Council's adolescent quota, and two are now being dealt with on that basis.
- 6.13 Housing is a problem also for two of the other young people. One, now a young adult, lives in a flat with a person described by the young person's family as being mentally disturbed. The family say that s/he has "a life of

it" where s/he is because s/he gets thrown out and taken back and then thrown out again. Their mother accepts that this is because of their behaviour, not just the flat-mate's: her child is on drugs and hardly washes, continues to cut themselves up, doesn't sleep for days on end, and can't bear to be still or inside for long periods.

- 6.14 He has previously lost two other Council tenancies, one because of complaints from a neighbour and the other because it was taken over by squatters. S/he has spoken to their probation officer about getting a flat of their own.
- 6.15 The other young person is desperately worried that s/he will have nowhere to live when s/he becomes adult next year, despite reassurances from the Council that s/he will be provided with a flat. This concern featured in the last review of their case, held nine months ago. S/he wanted to go home, and s/he wanted to talk about rehousing for their parents so that s/he could go home. There is not enough space for the young person in the flat they were allocated as a final offer from a neighbouring borough when they needed to move away from the area where the abuse had occurred.
- 6.16 So great is their worry about the young person's future housing that they wrote a letter to the social worker saying that they were no longer willing to accept responsibility for their child. This was interpreted by the department as being a total rejection of the young person. To them it was the only way they felt they could press home that they have no power to get their child housed and that they want the borough to take proper responsibility for that before it is too late and s/he is left alone to cope with the aftermath of the abuse.

Poverty

- 6.17 Poverty featured in the comments of young people, families and workers. The lack of money to live on had led one of the young people into organised thieving. One young woman asked us to imagine what it was like to have no money for tampons. This was echoed by one of the black young women in one of the residential units who said that she couldn't afford the skin and hair creams that she needed. A young person was still waiting for a clothing allowance promised over two months ago.
- 6.18 Another young person had no income from any legitimate source when we contacted them. The department had been supporting them as part of the arrangements made in wardship proceedings but confusion during the strike resulted in that money ceasing for several weeks, and in the young person being sent - wrongly, as s/he is 16 - to claim income support from the local DSS office.
- 6.19 We were told and read about the recurring problems over

benefits and allowances when young people moved to bed and breakfast accommodation or a hostel or a flat. In one case the social worker's plan to give a young person a fresh start through accommodation in a new area backfired when s/he was given wrong advice about which borough to claim housing benefit from and then got evicted by the landlord because he was unwilling to have housing benefit recipients. This counted against the young person because it added to the number of bed and breakfast places they had been allocated.

- 6.20 In another case the young person's relative carer has, for nine months, had money worries that the Council has power to alleviate. She should be receiving child benefit for the young person but, despite positive action by the local office to put things right, there are still problems in getting the book paid over to her regularly. She had some cash help earlier on for transport to and from school before the young person moved to her local one. She did not raise money problems with us, but she did say that some financial help would enable her to provide better for the young person.
- 6.21 She felt that a foster allowance would not be well received by her family because of the stigma felt about having a child in care, and she was unstinting in her praise of the support offered by the social workers involved. If a foster care allowance is not appropriate payment could - and we consider should - be authorised under section 17(6) of the Children Act.
- 6.22 Poverty affected some of the other families, too. One set of parents, when asked to comment on the service received from the Council, said how grateful they were to have received an allowance for weekend visits home. It had made a difference to what they could provide by way of food and entertainment.
- 6.23 Another parent was worried about the cost of visits to her other children in care. Visiting twice a week took £6 from her benefit of £56. It might not seem a lot, she said, but it meant she had to go without some other essentials, and she would have felt too embarrassed to ask for cash help. About two months ago a residential worker discovered she had not been reimbursed for her travel costs and she now gets them covered. That is a great help, but her low income still makes her hold back from offering to do more with or for her children.

Young people's views of care

- 6.24 On the whole, the young people we met were rather guarded in their responses to us. We can understand and sympathise with their hesitation, and with the reluctance of those who chose not to speak to us. It is not easy for strangers to

gain the confidence of young people; our official role must, we think, have created an added obstacle for them. We gained some useful insights but think we could have gained more if the team had included the expertise of someone more on their wavelength - such as someone from a young person's organisation, or someone who had experienced residential care, or a youth worker or guardian ad litem.

- 6.25 The reserve of the young people did not, however, prevent them from speaking out about their experiences. Meeting them moved us away quickly from any stereotypes we might have absorbed as a result of reading the articles of parts of their files. One young person complained that the articles made them appear as hapless victims, almost non people. We were struck by the way some of them are tackling life with determination, despite their appalling experiences.
- 6.26 They found it difficult to tell us of good experiences while they were in care. One was care giving you a roof over your head and a table to sit at when you had fallen out with your parents. One spoke with affection of individual workers who had listened, and done what they had promised, and been ready to join them for a chat and a laugh. Two said that good places were those where there was plenty to do.
- 6.27 Another said that a good place was where people helped you and that meant they would talk to you and get things done for you rather than leaving you to do them on your own. One had hated a social worker for always going on at her but could now see that as positive because she might otherwise have hated her parents - whom she loved - for going on at her instead.
- 6.28 They complained, at times bitterly, about their life in care. Perhaps the most succinct remark was from one who said that once you get into care you just get worse and worse. The most tragic was from a young person who said, with justification, that their life had been ruined. Two complained about losing their property and nothing being done to get it restored or replaced.
- 6.29 One complained about being ignored and, on a similar theme, another expressed anger at being excluded from a child protection conference and having people talk about your life behind your back. The promise to be included at 16 didn't materialise and that had created extra anger.
- 6.30 One young person deeply resented being left without a social worker at crucial parts of their life in care - s/he felt abandoned, not by the person who had left or not visited, but by the Council. It was striking how others, too, would willingly name individual workers who had been helpful or kind but did not name individuals who had acted otherwise. Their anger focused more on the system that had

failed them.

Preserving family links

- 6.31 In all but one case links have been preserved between the young people and their family. Some are more tenuous than others, but even where contact is brief and sporadic - and sometimes stormy - there is a strong sense that people care about their children or parents and that they will continue to remain important to one another. In almost all cases there is clear evidence of the commitment of the authority and of individual workers to retaining and sustaining family links.
- 6.32 One clear example of this is the young person looked after by a relative, and previously fostered by someone known to the family already. Neighbourhood services have involved the extended family in protecting and caring for the young person, and have enabled them all to remain involved even in the face of disagreements between some relatives. Family members have been drawn on to help solve problems that have arisen and their meeting together as a group has been facilitated by social workers before key planning meetings involving professionals.
- 6.33 There were, though, worrying examples of conflicts between residential and field staff that left young people and their families caught in the middle. A brief look at one file showed that those with parental responsibility had not been informed of the outcome of a recent review despite the legal requirement and the intention of the worker to do so. There were several parents who believed that they had retained contact with their children in spite of local authority actions that had made this difficult for them.
- 6.34 In one case where it had been decided that it would not be right for the young person to live with their parents, the decision was reversed some weeks later because the residential unit could not cope with their behaviour. In another case the department's understanding of the contact between a young person and their relatives was at odds with what we discovered when we spoke to them.

Families' views of care

- 6.35 The parents and other relatives who agreed to meet us were very willing to speak about their children's experiences. But it was not easy for them. Several broke down in tears as they talked, while others struggled to keep control. They expressed pain and anguish about what had happened to their children, they blamed themselves for their own past mistakes, and they blamed the Council for its failings too. Some acknowledged the problems of resources for the local authority and others acknowledged the difficulties of

controlling young people. Most were critical of the way their children and themselves had been treated.

- 6.36 They wanted social workers to listen to them, rather than listening only to what they wanted to hear. One who said this explained that her child had done all sorts of things to avoid staying at the place where s/he was being abused. It was some years ago now but she still remembers being told that she must try and persuade her child to like it there.
- 6.37 Another explained that they had lost confidence in going to reviews because the minutes recorded only what the workers wanted to remember. It felt as if workers were concerned about covering their backs rather than taking their views into account. There would only be a point in going to future meetings if they were tape recorded.
- 6.38 Families valued the individual workers who had been honest with them, had kept them informed about their children's progress and setbacks, and had understood the problems they encountered with their children and other agencies. They appreciated those workers who had understood their children and handled them firmly and who had backed them up as parents. Some were glad to have had the chance to tell us what they had been bottling up for years; one said they had not had the chance to say these things to anyone who they thought would really understand what they were going through.
- 6.39 They were upset at being told that the department was there first for their children, not themselves, and that they were not putting their child first if they contradicted the proposed plan for the child. It was as if they were uncaring if their point of view differed from the child's, especially if the views of workers and child coincided. They wanted not to be judged badly over and over again for their mistakes. They were still angry at not having being told immediately about changes in placement or incidents of abuse in care that had happened years ago.
- 6.40 Above all, as if echoing the person interviewed before them, they said repeatedly that they wanted children to be safe. It was too late for some of their children but if speaking to us would help other children and families then they were happy to do so. They carried their pain with them all the time, they said, and it came flooding back to the surface when they heard of any new case of abuse. They wanted to see children cared for in care, not abused.
- 6.41 They wanted more money spent on training people to deal with abuse, on recruiting people carefully, and on checking those who were employed for child care work. Those who commented said they simply could not believe that social workers who had abused children could be allowed to continue to work with or near children.

- 6.42 The message to other families from one parent was to be wary of people who might befriend them in order to abuse their children. Another said it was important not to stop getting your message across to social workers. She had given up in the end because she thought she was not being listened to. She hadn't stopped caring but she felt that people thought she had.

Reactions to the press articles

- 6.43 Some of the young people thought the information was true or largely true. Those who did not know the articles were being researched, or had little contact with the reporters, were furious that information about their lives had been made public in the way it was. One young person who was enraged that information about themselves was published without their permission was just as clear that s/he would not have given permission.
- 6.44 Another was disgusted that s/he had featured in the newspaper, and that a young relative had been bribed to tell about them, on the pretext that articles were being written that would make the young person into a star. The relative had not taken payment, and had regretted what they had said. At first their sister had been angry with them but now s/he was just angry with the newspaper for publishing information they had gleaned from another source.
- 6.45 The families' reactions varied. Some said that the descriptions of their children's circumstances and life styles were accurate, and they thought that the articles would bring home the problems children were suffering. One wished that the article had made a stronger point about the importance of parents being alert to the dangers from strangers who came into their life with the intention of abusing their friendship with children.
- 6.46 Others - and some of those who recognised the truth in the articles about their children - expressed their disgust at their children being used to sell newspapers. One family was cross that photos had not been returned to them, as promised, and that at least part of an interview had been taped without their knowledge or consent.

Knowledge about the published articles

- 6.47 In only one case had a young person or family been contacted by the Council after the articles appeared. That was a parent who was shown an article by a residential social worker in a home where her other children were living.
- 6.48 One of the young people we met had not seen the article

about themself. Nor had three of the parents. That shocked us almost as much as news of the articles shocked them. We had not realised that we would be bearers of such news: we had imagined that the Council would have been in touch with them immediately. We think they should have been.

6.49 We were told that instructions were given that families should be contacted. It is not clear whether those who no longer had a social worker were to be contacted and, if so, how. In any event it seems that no request was made for the senior management team to be told how young people and their families were feeling about the publicity. We think the team, and elected members, should have wanted to have this information and that it warranted priority attention, even during the strike.

6.50 We consider, too, that the journalists should have sent copies of the articles to the young people and families who had helped them, in the same way that that courtesy is usually extended to those professional groups and individuals who are consulted about feature-length articles.

Continuing responsibility

6.51 We hope that the Council will feel it has a continuing responsibility towards the young people and their families, despite the fact that most have formally left their care. It will be good if lessons are learnt for others from their experiences, but the Council may wish to do something tangible to support those who have been identified. It could, for example, contact them and ensure that they have excellent advice on how to deal with any grievance they have against the Council or the Evening Standard. It might wish to go further.

7. INTERIM OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE RESIDENTIAL UNITS

Drawing on the past

- 7.1 The fact that "B" is due to close shortly should not leave anyone comforted that the problems that have arisen will go away. Rather, we hope that as young people and staff move on time will be allocated to reflecting on the weaknesses - and the strengths - of the service provided, and to drawing out the lessons that can be learnt for future provision.
- 7.2 The latest committee papers that we had sight of indicated first, that the unit would be re-opened as one of two unstaffed 16+ hostels, and later, that the unit would cease to be a social services provision. We have not been able to check what members have approved since the later paper, of October 1992, but we are delighted with the assurance we have received that there is no plan to use the unit for unstaffed provision.
- 7.3 The new plans for adolescents include - among other things - supported lodgings, shared bedsits, self-contained flats and other self-contained units. The provision is to be unstaffed, but with lead tenants for the flats and bedsits.
- 7.4 We hope that the wealth of experience held by staff and young people who have lived at "B" will be harnessed as plans progress for these developments. They will have insights to contribute about the possible dangers of lead tenants and landlords being on their own and in a position to abuse the trust of young people living near them, as has happened at "B".
- 7.5 They will know something about the hazards of young people sharing accommodation with others whom they would not choose to share with. In relation to the dispersed self-contained units that are planned, they will know of the possible consequences for neighbours and the young people themselves of their first taste of freedom.

Clarity of purpose

- 7.6 There is an urgent need to clarify the function and purpose of "A". The main body of the report highlights some of the conflicting views that we found and the lack of agreement about the service offered. Hopefully, the refurbishing period can be used as a good breathing space for such a review. The need is pressing because, if not done at this stage, it will become hard to resist the temptation to make sure that a newly-refurbished unit is filled to capacity.

- 7.7 Decisions may well be made on pragmatic grounds rather than as a direct response to the identified needs of a particular young person. If that were to happen, no one should be surprised if the unit quickly ended up in difficulties or began to spiral out of control. The feeling that the place is safe needs to be addressed in parallel with the welcome improvements in comfort and physical safety.

Bridging the gap

- 7.8 We raise these points because we foresee real, and rather immediate, difficulties in the Council's ability to provide services to young people when "B" closes and while "A" gets its face lift. The situation during the first quarter of last year was described as chronic, with no resources available for 18 out of 44 young people needing longer-term residential provision. Over half the group were aged 15 or over.
- 7.9 The adolescent strategy is designed to address such gaps. However, several of the plans for replacing "B" are not due to be implemented until half-way through next year, at the earliest, and others that were to be in place this April are behind target for some reason. Where, we are left wondering, will young people go while the cuts and changes in services get implemented?
- 7.10 It is acknowledged that some of the gaps will need to be plugged by additional cash from the budget for private and voluntary establishments. This has been a casualty of cut-backs in recent years. We consider that, if not already given, a firm commitment will be needed from members to allow for greater expenditure, and to do so without any adverse impact on other children and young people whose placement is or might be funded from that source.

Responsibility for referrals

- 7.11 At "B" both field and residential workers told us that the referral of a particular young person was wrong. They knew she would not handle the freedom well and would require more support than was available. Social workers and their managers also anticipated that she would attract a network of friends into the home who would be difficult to deal with. This appears to be what happened. It followed on from a referral, resisted by the residential staff, of a violent young man released from a special Home Office unit, with predictable result.
- 7.12 The Children's Resource Panel proposed a referral to "A" that the home's staff say they resisted strongly. From previous knowledge they knew it would have created a dangerous mixture of young people. There appears to have been confusion with staff changes, and the field work staff

concerned did not realise until the placement had gone ahead that it posed a serious threat to the safety of the young person and the home.

- 7.13 The Council doesn't have the full range of facilities to provide for all its young people needing services. This is hardly unusual, and is frustrating for those who strive to look after children as near as home as possible. The Private and Voluntary Budget has an important role to play in widening the range of options, but where that resource is very restricted, or depleted, it is unwise to switch back to a bed in the borough that doesn't match the needs of a young person. It is not only unwise, it is unreasonable - for the young person in question and for the needs, and sometimes the safety, of those already in the unit.
- 7.14 Clarity is needed about who accepts responsibility for placements authorised by the Children's Resource Panel, and for the consequences of placements made in the face of disagreements between staff and panel members. Elected members have a role here - to know when resources are exhausted and to accept responsibility for decisions made as a consequence.

Press articles - responsibility of the Evening Standard

- 7.15 The addresses of "A" and "B" featured in the press articles. The number of the house was revealed as well as the name of the road. We consider it to be irresponsible in the extreme for a newspaper to give out such details about young people. We cannot think of anything that might justify such action. We have drawn attention to the impact this had on the lives of young people and workers, and we hope that journalists will ensure that their personal code of conduct will not allow such trauma to occur. We think it should be part of their professional code, too, if it is not already included.

Press articles - responsibility of the Council

- 7.16 We think that the organisation was at fault in its response to the homes being publicised. We acknowledge that members of a senior management team cannot and should not be involved with the day-to-day affairs that they have delegated to others. But what happened last October was no day-to-day matter. It is understandable that when officers are assailed by ministers, politicians and the press they will want to develop a strategy for responding to the demands they face. That strategy should include, and at the top of the list, the special needs of those receiving and providing services.

7.17 We think that a personal visit from a member of the senior team at the department's central office, to identify with the efforts being made by the workers to cope with the difficulties, would have been welcome. It would have demonstrated personal care in a service whose whole function is care. The same might also be said for supporting both groups of young people - the ones at "A" who were said to be devastated by the articles and the ones at "B" whom we were told handled the matter with skill and dignity.

In or out of control

- 7.18 Earlier in the report we set out the criteria by which observers could make judgements of the homes being in or out of control. It is not a simple matter. At any time within a home or unit control is finely balanced and threatened. Changes of behaviour of a resident, staff changes, or any other critical change can move the situation from being in control to being in difficulty or even out of control. A situation can be out of control for periods of minutes, hours, days or longer.
- 7.19 A manager told us that, in the recent past, control in one home had deteriorated to the point where the home was closed. In the more distant past a worker told us of a home where the manager seldom turned up for work and the staff absented themselves for the school holidays. We raise these examples to illustrate that being in or out of control is not a new phenomenon.
- 7.20 All but two of the residential staff we interviewed said that their unit had not been out of control in relation to the periods covered in the press articles. Some thought that the worst period was immediately after the publication of the articles. Others told us of other times when they felt the units had been out of control. Everyone said that they had been in difficulty. The incidents that staff handled during the periods of difficulty required considerable skill and courage.
- 7.21 If there was such a thing as a control meter it would be changing in the way that a barometer or speedometer does. Every day the staff in the units we visited are dealing with enormous pressures, challenges and variables. Some of the things that require urgent attention are beyond the control of unit workers. They include changing the physical conditions, increasing the feeling of safety, and providing important checks and balances. When last we visited the units staff were in control of what they could reasonably be expected to control.

8. OTHER MATTERS

- 8.1 The terms of reference for this interim report require us to report on "such other matters" as we consider relevant. In our work of investigating the current welfare of the young people several matters have arisen that we consider worthy of note at this stage. Some are proposals for immediate action while others require further work at the next stage.

Scrutiny of files and records

- 8.2 The information we have gleaned so far from the young people and their families - and from workers and managers - about the care, control and services received by the young people is riddled with contradictions. At times the differences are so great that it has been hard to keep in mind that people have been talking about the same people and events. It signals, we think, the importance of a careful scrutiny of the case files to try and unravel what has happened and what lessons might be learnt for other young people in future.

Decisions about placements

- 8.3 One thread running through the review has been comment on the reduced use of the budget for funding placements in private and voluntary establishments. Another has been the way that decisions are made about placements of young people in or out of the borough. We have not been able to explore these matters in any detail but we have been concerned about the deeply-held and often diametrically opposed views expressed. We have also been struck about how the appropriateness or otherwise of referrals to units has been a major source of frustration in several cases - for young people, parents, workers and managers.

The role of inspection

- 8.4 We have referred earlier to the monthly inspection reports of units. We are concerned that arms-length inspection appears to be given such low priority. An inspection post for children's services was set up last summer, but as a temporary two day per week post later extended to be full time but still temporary. We understand that the post is now unfilled. Late in the review we discovered that reports had been written last autumn, including one on one of the units we have examined. We had neither seen these reports nor knew they existed. We are concerned that they did not form part of the briefing material we received. We do not

know if they have been submitted to the case review sub-committee as planned. The work at the next stage needs to explore the role of inspection in the provision of services for children and their families. It is a cause of real concern to us that such an important requirement has been set up so long after the Children Act was implemented and on such a minimal basis.

Tackling the abuse of power

- 8.5 Another recurring theme in the interviews is great concern about what is perceived as a tradition of allowing or enabling staff to move on quietly when things have gone awry in their residential work. The perceived secrecy - described as the borough's "family secret" - engenders anxieties about the Council's willingness to bring to everyone's attention, and as openly as possible, the dangers young people can face from staff who hold power over them.
- 8.6 These are serious allegations and they need to be explored so that workers can know if their suspicions are well founded or not. If not, they can rest assured that their fears have been taken seriously. If there are grounds for the expressed anxiety then the department can seek to engage with staff and young people to work out ways of inspiring confidence that fears and doubts about people's behaviour should be raised with urgency and will be dealt with seriously.
- 8.7 Whatever the outcome, we hope that the Council will take the opportunity to strengthen its message to young people that the major concern is for their safety. This might lead to improved information, clearly and publicly expressed, and to the nurturing of support mechanisms for young people being looked after.
- 8.8 We consider that the terms of reference for the next stage of work should provide for a review of past staff moves.

Reaching out to those who have left care

- 8.9 The experiences of one of the young people raises serious concerns about the possibility that others in the children's home may also have been abused. The Council has written to former residents inviting them to make contact.
- 8.10 Quite by accident we have come across one young person who did not receive that letter and whose carers do have worries that he may have been abused in the home. We do not know whether any other young people have not been contacted either. We think that, in any event, the Council should go beyond this minimal attempt to reach out to young people once in their care.

8.11 We recommend that they commission help to explore other ways of contacting young people, to gain their confidence, offer support, and try and satisfy themselves about abuse that might have been perpetrated. We recognise that some, perhaps many, might choose not to respond. But all can be left with contact names, phone numbers and addresses that might be useful at some later stage in their life. The purpose of the exercise would not simply be to investigate, but also to equip people with tools for survival and support.

8.12 The work will require people with skill and sympathy, and with creative thoughts about how best to reach out to young people and their families. This might well involve the use of a confidential helpline and of local press and radio. It will also require an acknowledgement of the time needed for the painstaking work involved. Voluntary organisations with expertise in advising and advocating for young people and their families might be a useful source to tap.

Tackling abuse in the community

8.13 Families impressed on us the need for children to be safe with their families. The message came from those whose children had been abused by neighbours or others they had trusted. Their fear was that their children and others were not safe from offenders who were living in their midst or who would return there from prison.

8.14 It was a theme echoed by field staff and managers. The expressed concern of workers and families was that if the police could or would not take action then other agencies and members of the community needed to play their part in protecting children.

8.15 It has been no part of our brief so far to examine the response to allegations of organised or network abuse. But we are conscious of having been told, by a variety of different people, of the difficulties faced in trying to alert colleagues - or be alerted by them - of suspicions of abuse in local areas. We raise the matter now because we think that whoever takes on this term of reference should not limit it to an investigation of organised or network abuse.

8.16 What is just as important is to explore what arrangements are in place so that those with responsibility for child care in their neighbourhood can share information with others in a similar position. It is also important to consider how the strengths and knowledge of families in the community can be tapped so that they can play their part in protecting children from individuals or groups of people who are intent on harming children.

Consulting widely

- 8.17 At the start of this report we explained our plans for achieving wide and early circulation of a newsletter about the work we had been asked to do. Given the short time-scale originally planned for the interim report, it was a cause of deep regret to us that the mailout was not completed for several weeks. The delay was caused - in part at least - by the unease of managers about the way we had interpreted our brief.
- 8.18 We were further disappointed to discover that many of the people whom we interviewed or had contact with had not received their copy of the newsletter. It seems that it did not get sent to young people in residential care, to families, to the residential units in the borough, to staff at central office and to those in some of the neighbourhood offices. Nor has it gone to local voluntary organisations and places of worship. We have not yet had clarification about whether it was sent to local free and other newspapers.
- 8.19 We raise the matter here because we consider that management reviews of this kind should be undertaken in the spirit of wanting to consult widely with those providing services and with past, present and future recipients of services. We consider that the next stage of the review needs to begin with a fresh circulation of information.

9. INTERIM CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 During our work for this interim report we have focused on the welfare of the young people mentioned in the articles and on the current state of the two units identified. We could not have made any useful observations without understanding the context in which we were working. That required a wide range of reading of documents, files and reports.
- 9.2 It also involved an extensive interviewing process of people we chose to interview and of others who asked to see us. That work has yet to be completed. Some of those we interviewed have told us that once the interim report is available many more people may wish to talk to us.
- 9.3 There are high expectations of what the review might lead to. There is also, perhaps inevitably, some cynicism that the review will be a mask on what is happening or, if it is not, that the Council will suppress or ignore it.
- 9.4 It would be a pleasure to be able to report that generally, and particularly about the press reports, the situation was reasonable subject to some modest adjustments. That, unfortunately, is not our finding so far. The newspaper got it wrong in important detail, used sensational language and presentation for a subject that we consider too serious to be so treated, and made a fundamental error of judgement in revealing the addresses where young people and staff were living.
- 9.5 Nevertheless, on the whole, the articles were well researched and contain important truths. Many people were angry that a newspaper published the confidential details of vulnerable young people in care. For one young person the publicity was yet another abuse. At least two families are still wrestling with their emotions over publicity they knew nothing about until we visited them. There is, however, a strong theme from almost all the people who talked to us that if the articles produce what they see as necessary change then they will have been worthwhile.
- 9.6 At this stage of the review we are anxious about what we have seen, what we have read, and what people have told us. As we talked to staff at all levels we sensed a deep malaise, and one that seems to go far beyond the current troubles of industrial action and expenditure cuts.
- 9.7 There was confusion and conflict about roles and responsibilities. There were conflicts about style, organisation, objectives and philosophy which did not seem to be being dealt with. We appreciate that differences and

dissent are part and parcel of any organisation, but the dissatisfactions that we were picking up and were being presented with seemed graver and more entrenched.

- 9.8 We have approached our task in the spirit of wanting to listen and learn, and we have been impressed with people's generosity of time and thought. We hope that the next stage will continue to harness the talent and goodwill that abound, as well as the energy that people at all levels wish to put into the development and expansion of high-quality services for Islington's young people and their families.

10. PLANNING FOR THE NEXT STAGE

- 10.1 The priority for the interim report was speed. We recommend that the emphasis for the final report be an exercise that is well planned, widely agreed, and well executed.
- 10.2 Apart from what we have learnt about the situation in Islington, we have learnt about our strengths and weaknesses, the sort of support this type of review requires, and what we might do differently if we werestarting again from scratch. We cannot change the methodology for producing the interim report, but we can try to ensure that what we have learnt so far will be applied to any further work. We list below what we consider is required for the next stage of the work.
- 10.3 We think it would be useful to have a short period of reflection on what has emerged so far. We recommend this for Islington management, the DOH and ourselves.
- 10.4 We suggest an examination of the terms of reference to ensure that they are understood clearly by all parties. There is, for instane, clearly a misunderstanding about the term of reference on network abuse.
- 10.5 The SSI have said they thought it was part of our brief. We are also aware of different perceptions held by officers and members about the remit for the review of the care, control and services provided to the young people in the articles. We were advised that we were to investigate how the department had handled the cases, from the point of referral to the press publicity. It seems that members did not expect us to study the case files in detail. We cannot see how the brief we were given could be done without careful scrutiny of the work and events recorded.
- 10.6 Agreement is needed about any amendments thought necessary to the terms of reference. Parties may wish to suggest amendments in the light of issues that have arisen. For example, the provision of residential care in the borough cannot be detached from other resources such as foster care and provision out of the borough. Earlier in the report we suggested that the revised terms of reference should also provide for a review of past staff moves.
- 10.7 Agreement is needed about the level of resources to be applied to each term of reference and the nature of those resources. This is an area of disagreement between us. We are both agreed that, given what we have seen so far, any sensible review will require more and perhaps different timescales. We are agreed that, subject to what exactly is worked out, we may not have the time available to undertake a review on the time envisaged as needed. We agree that for

any larger-scale piece of work the existing administrative and professional resource would have to be augmented.

- 10.8 Where we disagree is that one of us believes that, providing a detailed plan can be made and existing resources supplemented, the review can go forward to completion. The other consultant considers that it would be opportune to reconsider the composition of the review with a view to ensuring that any panel is better able to undertake the major work ahead. On-hand expertise is considered necessary to deal adequately, swiftly and with confidence with those matters that have been dealt with so far by dint of time-consuming and fragmented external consultation. These include issues of law, race and expertise in residential care.
- 10.9 Finally, decisions are needed about the cost of the exercise. So far one consultant has worked for 45 days on the project and the other has worked for 55 days.