CARE STAFF ACCUSED

By GARY WELFORD, Care Reporter

THREE former care staff are to be prosecuted after a lengthy police inquiry into alleged abuse at a Sunderland children's home.

The ex-members of staff from Witherwack House have been summoned to appear before magistrates later this month.

Police say three former employees of the home - Kevin Roll, 28, Allan Dargall, 33, and Glynn Tamblyn, 36 - will face charges concerning alleged cruelty to children.

A statement issued by Northumbria Police today said: "Following inquiries into events in 1987 at Witherwack House, children's home, three people have been summoned for offences concerning alleged cruelty to children."

The statement added: "All have left the employment of Sunderland Social Services."

"These matters are now sub-judice and no further police comment will be made."

The news is the latest development in the scandal which has rocked the city council's social services department in recent months.

It comes only days after councillors agreed to make sweeping changes in the way children's homes are run following a report from childcare expert Evelyn Cream.

He was called in by the council after a report by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) highlighted allegations of physical and sexual abuse at homes.

Seven people were arrested in all, and other kids are still being considered by the Crown Prosecution Service.

In addition, a 15-year-old boy has been sent for crown court trial on sex charges.
SOCIAL SERVICES TO GET HOME TRUTH

By BARBARA McCLENNAH, Merseyside Echo

AN independent expert in child care meets councillors next week to tell them how Sunderland's troubled social services must improve.

Emlyn Cassam was called in by the city council on the recommendation of the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) after a team of inspectors produced a damning report on the state of children's homes.

The SSI highlighted allegations of physical and sexual abuse of children in care by staff and former staff at the homes.

Their concerns, along with that of former social services director Colin Smart, led to a major police investigation being launched.

So far seven people have been arrested and files are currently being studied by the Crown Prosecution Service.

Mr Cassam, a nationally known expert in child care and a retired director of Norfolk's social services,

He spent time in Sunderland studying the running of its social services department with special reference to child care practice in residential homes.

His report, first revealed in the Echo, is highly critical of management and calls for major changes in policy and direction.

Today he said: "The criticisms levelled at the council by the new six-month-old and Sunderland Council has already taken great steps towards overcoming those problems. Thus, it, essentially, a fair and objective document."

What is important is that we learn from the past, it does not help today's children or care workers to dwell on those events.

POINTER:
"My report is intended to help in this process by giving strong pointers to the way ahead. I believe Sunderland has the energy and capacity to meet those challenges."

Coun Louise Bramall, chairman of the social services committee, said: "From Eric Timmins we were 'sacked' by the Labour group welcomed Mr Cassam's report.

She stressed the council had already implemented several measures as a result of the SSI report. These included a programme of special training for care workers, a review of staffing, and an upgrading of children's homes."
DAMMING REPORT FROM THE EXPERT

WITHIBROOK INTERMEDIATE TREATMENT UNIT, one of the three homes heavily criticised.

HELP PEACE VICTIMS ABUSE

YOUNGSTERS abused while in Sunderland Council's care should be offered counselling to help them come to terms with their suffering.

That is one of the recommendations thought to have been made by child care expert Emily Cassam to councillors and social services officials.

The report has yet to be made public but Mr Cassam is known to believe enough time has been spent by the council looking into possible past cases of abuse on children either still in care or now adults.

The council launched its own investigation into allegations of sexual and physical abuse of young people in its care after the death of Eddison Jones, aged 16, who was found dead in a rubbish skip three months ago.

Inspections found a repressive regime and an overuse of restraint which at times bordered on assault, when they looked at Withibrook.

Mr Cassam is said to be worried that while council child protection officers are focusing on old cases, their expertise is also needed for urgent new abuse cases on children still living in the community.

To make sure that as many children as possible who have suffered abuse in the past are traced, Mr Cassam is understood to be keen to set up a powerful new network.

The council had already set up a child's complaint's procedure well before the current allegations of child abuse surfaced.

Another council has been called in to carry out inspections of the homes not recently visited by theSSI.

"SHUT AT LEAST ONE CHILDREN'S HOME"

THE system of large, expensive children's homes should be abandoned by Sunderland Council.

According to Emily Cassam the homes are too costly to run, do not cater to the needs of all children and cause problems for parents living in their nearby homes.

The answer is to close at least one home and probably two in the next two years.

Instead of running children in homes Sunderland social services must look at other ways of dealing with them.

Other councils have already done this, but Sunderland is lagging well behind.

Between 15 to 20 children with severe problems can live in a home as it is one home.

Many have been abused or neglected before coming into council care and need very careful handling to help them overcome the trauma of their youth.

Mr Cassam believes having large numbers in individual homes actually encourages staff to rely too much on the system of educating children and is encourages repressive regimes.

CASH IS MISSING THE VITAL TARGETS

SUNDERLAND spends millions of pounds caring for its children but the investment is wasted by poor management and lack of support for those people in greatest need, says Mr Cassam.

So far, members of the social services committee have agreed to close three homes over the next two years.

That decision was made after former social services director Colin Smart warned that council homes were out of step with the standards and the authority demanded of private homes.

He said homes were too small and there were not enough staff.

Mr Smart argued there were also too many places for children in one bed and that numbers must be cut.

That could be done by converting two rooms into single rooms, closing of others and a move towards respite care.

His views were backed up by Roy Parker when he took over as director.

But Mr Cassam is understood to be sceptical that Sunderland can find the £4 million needed to bring the homes up to the standard of the private sector.

His report will tell councillors that unless they can provide for all the work to be done in four years, elderly people will be waiting too long for improvements.

The alternative is to close homes down and sell them. Cash raised could go towards improving the others, argues Mr Cassam.

Mr Cassam will suggest one home being closed each year for the next four years.

STANDARD

Large children's homes only work well if Mr Cassam has warned councillors, if staff are trained to the highest standard and have natural ability in dealing with disturbed children.

Even so, a long-term stay in a home can be just as damaging to the child and is an abnormal way to spend childhood, he warns.

Instead the council has to set up a network of alternatives which would give children something in the community of possibilities.

Children with problems, but who have not committed crimes, could be given day, weekend or even evening care.

Others may need professional, highly trained foster parents while some could be looked after through links up with housing agencies to provide supervised housing.

Mr Cassam is also understood to have called on the scraping of the council's system of educating children in residential homes.
**Echo Phonn: Wearside 534411**

**Sunderland Echo, Tuesday, March 3, 1992—3**

**Shock claims of Wearside care boys**

**From Page 1**

incidents where restrained seemed to have

assaulted.**

a council’s new social services director

Ray Parker, praised the centre’s

its reliability. We are not happy about its contents but

are we not happy about its contents but

we accept the criticism levelled at the three

rehabilitation centres at the wards

Social services chairman Coun Eric

Time and again and said some of the SSI’s 57

recommendations had already been

The stories of the two young men, how-

ever, revealed that incidents alleged by the SSI were

not isolated breaches in child care procedures

at Wearside. They say they sustained three years of

physical and mental abuse by former staff which

*Potting*

**SUNDERLAND Council is to face claims for damages over the treatment of two youngsters in their care.**

**They say they are both now 20-year-old men, but the memory of three years they spent at one of the borough’s homes still haunts them.**

**They say it affected every waking hour of their lives, their lives haunt them in their sleep and limits their ability to have relationships with family and friends.**

**Today they ended eight years of silence to tell to**

Echo Municipal Editor Serenita McCallum about a system they say they feared.

Some of Jim and Bryan were not two men’s

real names. They have been changed to protect their identities in this article.

The council is trying to play down what Jim said, but says they’re not only 12 or 13 is pretty frightening to have up to three men grab you and make you face down on the floor before pulling your arm behind your back until it hurts. That’s what we understand as restraint.

**The two recalled how a holiday to**

Dewsbury Hill turned into a nightmare when staff were forced to walk, the guard’s list. They had to try to turn us around when they were trying to prevent another assault on the holiday. They said that the guard’s list was too thick to read and that it was only when they were walking that staff were forced to turn us around.

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Lad died after coffee break op

A TEN-year-old South Tyneside boy died after a routine operation in which the anaesthetist left the theatre for coffee. Now a disciplinary hearing has been held.

In hospital Paul Parson, aged 13, had a heart attack on the operating table at the new-built Whitley Hospital in South Shields and died five days later.

Paul, who suffered from bronchial asthma, had been undergoing an operation to repair his left arm, broken in a fall at the Greenhow Pub in Jarrow.

Yesterday Dr Aye Paracha admitted leaving the theatre during the operation to answer his mobile phone and have a cup of coffee.

The anaesthetist also admitted to the General Medical Council's professional conduct committee that he did not tell a coroner of his absence during the operation in April, 1998.

VERDICT

Last August an inquest in Sunderland returned a verdict of death by misadventure caused by lack of care after the High Court court made a verdict of misadventure delivered by the inquest.

Speaking for the council, Rosalind Foster, said Paul had a history of asthma and should have been supervised throughout the operation.

Nurse Beth Harvey told the hearing she had to call Dr Paracha back to the theatre three times before Paul went into cardiac arrest.

Nursing sister Ann Arber said she had spent ten minutes drinking coffee with Dr Paracha of Burnley, Lancashire.

Asked whether she questioned why the doctor was having a coffee during an operation she replied: "No, because it was common practice."

Dr Paracha denies serious professional misconduct and discrediting the profession.

He also denies leaving Paul without proper supervision and monitoring.

Lawyer Mr D Paracha said he was asked to do more than ten minutes on each nurse.


EXCLUSIVE

TWO young Weardside men today broke their silence to talk exclusively to the Echo about the suffering they say they endured in a Sunderland children's home.

Now both 20 years-old, and free of local authority control, they recounted an alleged three years of hell at the hands of a small band of care workers.

They spoke out on the day a team from the Department of Health Social Services Inspectorate released a 31-page damning report on the state of three Sunderland Council children's homes in the 1990s.

The report, first revealed by the Echo last month, was written after the DSS inspectors visited three of Sunderland's 12 children's homes.

REASONS

Last night Ken Curran, assistant chief inspector for the Northern DSS, revealed concerns by Sunderland's former Director of Social Services, Colin Smart, was one of the reasons they carried out their inspection.

Mr Smart took early retirement from his job after just a year at the top saying he "could no longer cope with the demands of the job".

The DSS team visited three residential units:

- The small family unit, Avenue Vivian in Forest House
- Purpose-built Whitley House
- Wellesley Nautical Centre in Blyth, Northumberland.

They found serious management: insufficient, unqualified staff who showed commitment but were given little training; rundown buildings; lack of privacy for children; serious misuse of restraint and a repressive regime.

In their report inspectors warned that as late as last year they had "read on file and were told by children of a number of..."
Pinched inch cost driver £50
CLEADON driver John Robson pinched a £50 licence cost driver.

Self-employed Mr Robson of Whitburn, Cleadon, was fined £25 by magistrates in the district court after admitting the theft.

Mrs Robson, aged 43, of Whitburn, was fined £50 for failing to report the theft.

The driver and woman were both fined a total of £25.

A contoversial Washington pub has been given the chance to prove it is not a trouble spot.

Sunderland's public health committee has granted the license to the town.

The public health committee said the license to the pub was a 'definite' move towards closing the pub.

The license was granted on the condition that the pub must prove it is not a trouble spot.

The pub, which has been closed since last year, has been inspected by the health authority and found to be in a 'good state of order'.
ALARM BELLS OVER CARE

Home is home from home

YOUNGSTERS living in small community homes in Sunderland are well cared for, according to members of the Social Services Inspectorate. The homes provide a "positive nurturing environment" for children who are referred to them. The homes have been strengthened in recent years, with children and residents being staffed and monitored closely. The homes, which cater to children with physical, emotional, and mental needs, are run by Sunderland Council.

A LIST of changes has been given to Sunderland Social Services following the inspection of three children's homes. It was carried out in November last year, and as well as looking at the homes, the team, led by acting chief social services inspector J.K. Corcoran, interviewed staff, residents, and former residents. Their draft report sounds warning bells over the care at the three homes in Sunderland, with recommendations for improvement. In one of the homes, Wellaby in Birth and Avenue Vivian in Fence Houses, there were concerns over the way children were treated and their safety. The report highlights issues such as inadequate monitoring, lack of privacy, and poor training of staff. The report also calls for improvement in the way children are supported and for better communication between staff and residents.

Top-level probe demands action

- Low level of children's involvement in decisions about their home and future
- Lack of knowledge and training of child protection procedures
- Lack of records and failure to keep records
- Poor communication and lack of training for staff
- Insufficient training and inadequate support for staff

The report states that the council has not yet taken action to address these issues, and it calls for immediate improvements to be made.

Shameful sights of dirt and damage

SHAMEFUL sights of dirt and damage have been reported by social workers over the care of children in Sunderland. They have raised concerns over the general state of the homes, with children being kept in unhygienic conditions. The report also highlights issues such as inadequate monitoring, lack of privacy, and poor training of staff. The report calls for immediate improvements to be made, including the provision of enough clean and safe accommodation, and better training for staff.

AMENITIES

The home was dirty, damaged, and lacking in basic amenities. There was little in the way of home comfort for children living there. The report highlights issues such as inadequate heating, insufficient storage space, and lack of privacy for children. The report calls for immediate improvements to be made, including the provision of enough clean and safe accommodation, and better training for staff.

WELLSLEY Nautical School in Northumberland

No cheer for children at bleak house

WELLSLEY Nautical School in Northumberland is run by Sunderland Council, but it is serious concerns about the care of children and their safety. The school has been criticized for inadequate monitoring, lack of privacy, and poor training of staff. The school has been ordered to improve its standards, or it may face closure. The report highlights issues such as inadequate training and inadequate support for staff, and it calls for immediate improvements to be made.
Discipline problems in Sunderland's children's homes are a result of too little cash and too many restrictions on staff, according to the councilor in charge of social services.

Social services chairman Coun Eric Timmins said councils across the country are now having to come to terms with the full effects of the Children Act and reaction to Staffordshire's Pindown scandal.

Under the Act care workers must draw up a statement of purpose for children in care. Children and parents have a say in deciding a plan of action, tailored, for the child - including a choice of home.

One effect of the Act is that young people will now rarely be sent into care, Coun Timmins said.

Council chiefs and police warned that there would be less spare cash under supervision of parents who had already visited them.

When the Act was first mooted Sunder-

land Councils spent more than £4 million on care and were looking to bring in £10 million to bring their services up to a standard required by the Act.

One of the most dramatic over-reactions to the Children Act was a £100,000 extra in staffing which cost social services £40,000 extra.

We're powerless to act, say staff

Sex abuse inquiry in council homes

STAFF working with some of Sunderland's disturbed young children are finding their hands tied because of the new Children Act.

The Act, aimed at combating over-reaction to children's home scandal, has led to a severe lack of power to deal with the problems.

Last week a woman worker won her job back after being sacked for 'inappropriate treatment' of a 15-year-old girl in one of the homes.

EYEPED IX

"There have been a lot of national media reaction to Pindown," said one social worker last night. "It all seems to be a total breakdown of the system, both in care and..."
Shocking allegations of rape and brutality

by Joe Murphy

The Echo campaign for a crackdown on 'bail-breakers' will end in victory this week.

New measures to halt the rising tide of crime committed by people out on bail for other offences will be announced by Home Secretary Kenneth Baker. The measures were championed by the Echo's 'Bail-Breakers' campaign, which called for tough new laws to beat the crooks.

The Home Office has been under pressure since police forces revealed the high level of crimes being committed by bail-offenders.

Starting statistics produced by Northumbria Police showed 111 per cent of burglaries were committed by people on bail awaiting trial. 54 per cent of thefts from vehicles and 43 per cent of car thefts involved bail-breakers.

A handful of criminals is responsible for a large percentage of thefts and break-ins.

One North-East youth committed a staggering 280 offences while on bail. A 13-year-old boy was arrested for 50 burglaries, robberies and assault while awaiting trial.

In December, the Echo was invited to give a presentation on 'bail-breakers' to MPs on the Conservative backbench Home Affairs Committee. Our dossier was then passed on to the Home Office by worried MPs.

Committee chairman Sir John Wheeler, who also chairs the powerful Commons Select Committee on Home Affairs, today paid tribute to our campaign.

He said: 'The Echo's contribution was very helpful. It was an invaluable contribution and the members of the committee warmly congratulated the newspaper for its public service.'

Northumbria Police today said they were 'determined', though they had no suspects. These police officers are faced with a new tide of offending while on bail.

Instead he will appear at Tynemouth Magistrates Court on March 3.

Four pages of motoring news inside today
Inquiry centres on sex sacking

when the SSI pointed it out we immediately called it in the police.

"We took the ultimate sanction, sacking, at the time but for some reason police weren't called in."

The three staff all worked at the same home and the men were sacked after it was discovered they were setting children in their care against each other, urging them to be violent to each other.

The council spokesman said Sunderland's new director of social services, Roy Parker, was keen to be as frank as possible about the police inquiry and how the council has launched itself.

"There are obviously areas of confidentiality we have to respect but we have nothing to hide.

"Largely for our own peace of mind we have set up an inquiry team to trawl through all records of children in our care going back to 1985. The aim is to ensure we have not missed any child possibly being abused while in our care.

"So far we have four no cases of physical, sexual or psychological abuse."

The spokesman dismissed claims by social workers that children in care were out of control and involved in illegal sex acts among each other, drug taking or prostitution.

"People must realise we have no secure units. The children in our care go about in the community just like other children, but live in our homes.

"They come across influences such as solvent abuse, drugs, and sex like any other child.

"We believe the incidents highlighted in the press are isolated ones.

"It is not the case that every glue sniffer, promiscuous youngster or car thief comes from a children's home."
CARE HOME PROBLEMS

EXTRA STAFF NEEDED TO HELPcope

FEATURES DREAMING

FUN AND GAMES FOR ALL THE FAMILY — PAGE 32

Sundowner Echo Thursday, February 6, 1992-17
ALLEGATIONS of sexual abuse have been strenuously denied by council officials.

The investigation by the Social Services Inspectorate, headed by Mr. Smart, has resulted in the council being accused of "failing to act on reports of abuse at one of the homes and not acting to protect children." The council has denied these allegations, stating that "there is no basis for the allegations and that no action has been taken."
THREE people have been quizzed by cops probing a child abuse scandal in the North.

Two men and a woman were ARRESTED as part of a major investigation into the running of children's homes in Sunderland.

And a council chief has RESIGNED after it was revealed his wife works at one of the homes being probed.

Meanwhile, the Social Services Inspectorate have confirmed last year's Sunday Sun investigation into alleged sex abuse in Sunderland council homes sparked their investigation.

An SSI spokesman said: "Reports in the Sunday Sun in June 1991 played a major part in the decision to launch an inquiry."

This was despite the council INSISTING the arrival of the SSI was "routine."

A spokesman for the SSI said: "This was NOT a routine inquiry."

Detectives swooped on Thursday after digging through files going back TEN years. The three people arrested were questioned about allegations that a woman had sex with a 14-year-old boy at a home in 1987 as well as claims of physical abuse against youngsters.

No charges have been brought and the three were released on bail pending further inquiries.

Detectives have already charged one 15-year-old boy with rape and other sexual assaults against girls as young as eight at a home.

INQUIRY

More than a DOZEN other criminal allegations are being investigated by a police squad based at Gill Bridge station in Sunderland.

The inquiry is expected to last months.

Councillor Tom Cumiskey has quit as vice-chairman of the social services' committee following the police investigation at the home where his wife works.

Pat Cumiskey is a residential social worker and worked at the home at the time of the alleged offences in 1987.

There is NO suggestion that Mrs Cumiskey, 45, was involved in the incidents.

By NIGEL GREEN

But Councillor Cumiskey said he was worried there could be a "conflict of interests."

At his home in Airdrossan Road, Farringdon, Sunderland, he said: "My wife never talked about what went on at the home because her work is confidential."

"And when it came to meetings of the social services committee, I always declared the fact that my wife worked at the home."

Later Councillor Cumiskey, an unemployed electrician, said: "I have decided to stand down as vice-chairman."

MINFIELD

"There is now a focus of attention on residential child care within the borough and I feel I can no longer take a prominent role."

"I do not wish to enter the minfield of conflict of interest."

The SSI are expected to publish a full report on their investigations by the end of the month.

But they have already said they were concerned that staff "lacked guidance and control."

The SSI first looked at the running of Witherwack House in Sunderland, Wellesley Nautical School in Birith, and Avenue Vivian in Fenecshouses.

But following their disturbing findings, the SSI ordered Sunderland Council to conduct an inquiry into the running of most of the 12 homes, which look after 200 youngsters.
Children's Home,

Shut at least one

The Daily Mail, 26 May 1993

Victims of Abuse
HELP PLEA FOR THE

Disgraceful, Inhumane, Treatment Unfit for the Three Homes Heavily Criticised.
UNION HAPPY AT ABUSE INQUIRY

THE leader of Sunderland Council's 3,000-strong Nalgo branch today said he would welcome a public inquiry into the running of the city's social services.

On Tuesday Nalgo stewards meet to discuss the latest developments in the child abuse scandal which has rocked Sunderland's social services and so far led to six arrests by a special police team.

It was set up to look into allegations of physical and sexual abuse by staff and former staff on children living in the city's 12 children's homes.

Among those arrested were Nalgo members working in social work and the union has grown increasingly concerned over lack of support by management.

Social-service workers were horrified when existing staff, carrying out their job according to very strict laid-down procedures, were hauled in for questioning by police.

That led to the branch warning its members were considering boycotting child-protection work unless relationships with police could be re-established.

Bob Scott, Nalgo branch secretary, said his members "did not feel reassured" over the way management was tackling the issue.

"We are coming to the position, because of ongoing press and media interest and the uncertain affect it is having on field and residential workers, that a public inquiry may be required.

"We would support any such call for a public inquiry.

Nalgo has already asked Mr Parker to issue clear guidelines to staff.

These says Nalgo should see the child protection unit involved from the first day social services take on a new referral.

"Social workers could then feel free to carry on with their job if they knew police were involved from stage one."
YOU'RE TO BLAME, SAYS UNION CHIEF

By BARBARA McCLENNAN
Municipal Editor

THE leader of Sunderland Council's 3,000-strong white-collar union NaLo today condemned the people running its social services department.

Bob Scott, NaLo branch secretary, firmly laid the blame for problems in the city's 12 children's homes at the feet of those running the corridors of power.

He said the scandal which had so far led to six present and former social services staff being interviewed by police over allegations of abuse of children in care emanated "principally from poor management".

He was speaking after a meeting of social services stewards was called to discuss the recent criticism from the Department of Social Services Inspectorate (SSI).

"We noted that residential social workers still operate in appalling conditions subject to low pay, staff shortages and low morale. Management continue to rely upon good will from residential social workers who, in many cases, are untrained, unqualified and inexperienced."

He said Sunderland had a reputation of being a low-paying employer, commenting: "This authority is seen both internally and externally as a low-paying employer which has caused recruitment and retention difficulties particularly affecting qualified and experienced staff."

Mr Scott said his branch warned the council as early as July last year of issues which were later highlighted in the SSI report. Moves to get a proper consultation system set up between workers and bosses had been rejected by management.

He said his members were angry that the burden of adverse publicity is falling on front-line workers, field and residential social workers.

Last night's meeting decided there should be a better way of dealing with the issues highlighted by the SSI and independent expert Emlyn Cassam.

Reports from the SSI and Mr Cassam both criticise management and training of staff as well as pay structures for workers and support given from central administration.

"The branch itself feels unable to call for a public inquiry or other method of examining these issues."

"But, said Mr Scott, his members would offer full support for any such inquiry."

He said: "The public of Sunderland and elected members and staff within the social services department need to be assured that past mistakes are not repeated."
A ONE-YEAR-OLD girl and two boys under four have been placed on the Sunderland child sexual abuse register, a shock report reveals today. A further 27 children under one-year-old have been added to “at risk” registers to protect them from varying forms of abuse. Sunderland’s child protection committee register now covers 335 “at risk” children, according to the group’s annual report. Of those children, 177 are boys and 192 girls with 198 under four years old. The report is compiled by health, social and volunteer workers. More than 50 girls under 17 are registered as at risk from sexual abuse. More girls than boys appeared on the register under this category in five to ten years and over ten years age groups. Numbers on the register under sexual abuse increase with age for girls significantly. The “grave concern” category, which has 48 new registrations, covers children who are risk because of an abuser in the family or household. In this category boys aged up to four were found to be almost twice as likely than girls to be on the register, but rates for under 10s in both sexes were particularly high. Of the total number of children on the at risk register the split in types of abuse was:  
- Sexual abuse – 16 per cent  
- Physical abuse – 18.4 per cent  
- Neglect – 15.7 per cent  
- Emotional abuse – 9.5 per cent  
- Grave concern – 41 per cent.  
All of those showed reductions on the previous year, except the “grave concern” group which had increased by ten per cent. Throughout the year 170 children were taken off the “at risk” list. But the report warns: “It appears that there is more sexual abuse of male children than we are identifying.” It is clearly necessary to consider that the child or adolescent abuser may have been a victim of abuse.”

VULNERABLE
It also says: “In general, younger children are increasingly vulnerable to abuse with decreasing age. Younger boys appear to be particularly at risk in the grave concern and physical neglect areas. It is clear from our work with older sexually abused girls that they have been abused much earlier in their lives than the age of disclosure.”

Compared with elsewhere in the region, Sunderland’s child abuse rates are lower – particularly compared with Newcastle, North and South Tyneside. But Sunderland’s rate of abuse per thousand is slightly higher at 4.7 than the national rate of 4.0. In Newcastle the figure is 6.2 per 1,000 children.

Newcastle’s annual report states that since 1988 the number of children on the register has increased significantly. In 1989 there were 389 registered. This rose to 440 in 1990 and latest figures show a rise to 493.
BOY FACES TRIAL ON CHILD RAPE CHARGES

By BARBARA McCLENNAN, Municipal Editor

A 15-year-old boy was today committed for trial at Newcastle Crown Court on two charges of raping young girls and a third serious sex offence involving a boy.

The boy was living in a children's home in Sunderland at the time of the alleged offences along with the youngsters named as his victims.

Sunderland Juvenile Magistrates had declined jurisdiction because of the serious nature of the charges.

The boy is accused of committing rape between January 18, 1990 and April 8, 1991 and a second rape between October 11 and January 15, 1991. His alleged victims are aged between six and nine and the offences only came to light after the Department of Health's Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) arrived on Wearside to look at the state of three children's homes in the city.

CHANGES

The SSI was called in by Colin Smart, then director of social services, who had become increasingly alarmed over allegations of abuse which he uncovered after he took up his new post last year.

Mr Smart quit before he was able to see through major changes to children's homes he had put to councillors.

It was SSI inspectors who highlighted earlier cases of abuse by staff.

They said some had gone unreported to police and that led a full-scale inquiry.

Police led by Detective Superintendent Dave Wilson Northumbria's Child Protection Unit trawled through children's records and discovered the cases which went before today's sitting of Sunderland Juvenile Court.

A charge of indecently assaulting a girl against the boy was dropped by magistrates but the boy still faces five other charges.

They are two indecent assaults of girls and one involving a boy between January 12, 1990 and April 8, 1991 and a fourth indecent assault of a boy between October 11 and January 15 this year.

He also stands accused of gross indecency with a boy between October 11 and January 15.

Those five cases were adjourned until November 26.
City reels over care probe

From Page 1

several years ago.
Friends and family say she is deeply distressed and mystified by her suspension.
They say she has not been told what allegations led to Mr Marsden’s action.
Today, fighting back tears, she said: “I have been told I am not allowed to comment on this matter.”
Mrs Marland was interviewed late last year by the city’s former Director of Social Services, Colin Smart, over allegations made by another department member, dating back to 1987.
Friends say she was never told exactly what the allegations were, but was told no action was to be taken.

QUIT
Mr Smart quit his post in February because of “pressures of the job”.
By the time he took early retirement he had identified several areas of concern over all aspects of care in Sunderland, including children’s homes.
He found that abuse allegations against staff going back years had not been investigated and called in both police and the Department of Health’s Social Services Inspectorate (SSI).
The SSI produced a damning report on care standards in children’s homes.
It was later backed by independent advisor Emlyn Cassam, called in to help put Social Services on the right track, and to advise councillors on the choice of Mr Smart’s successor.
Care workers in child cruelty trial

THREE former Wearside care workers accused of child cruelty will face trial – despite attempts to have the case kicked out of court.

The suspects were arrested as part of a major probe by detectives and social service inspectors into the running of children's homes in the city.

Seven men and women were arrested but only three have so far been charged as part of an inquiry involving Northumbria Police's child protection squad.

Kevin Roffe, Alan Dingwall and Glynis Tamblin face allegations of abuse made by youngsters in care between 1986 and 1987.

The allegations relate to events at Witherwack House, a home for problem children, and during a camping trip to the Lake District.

Yesterday, the suspects appeared before Sunderland magistrates for committal proceedings expected to last a week.

Their solicitors, Paul Turnbull, Cecil Emmerson and Frank Watson argued

Children cruelty trial

that the clients had no case to answer and called for the charges to be kicked out.

But today, following evidence from two 18-year-old former residents of Witherwack, Mr Emmerson said he and his fellow defence solicitors, accepted there was a case to answer.

Magistrates committed the three for trial at Durham Crown Court at a date yet to be fixed.

Roffe, 29, of South Terrace, Southwick, faces nine charges.

Dingwall, 33, a telephone engineer of Howarth Street, Millfield, faces eight charges.

And Tamblin, 36, now living in Hitchin, Hertfordshire, faces seven charges.

The suspects are all on unconditional bail.

Reporting restrictions have not been lifted.
Two guilty of cruelty

Two North social workers at a council-run children's home escaped jail after they were convicted of carrying out ritual punishment on youngsters.

Kevin Roffe, 30, was found guilty of cruelty to four children and Glynis Tumblin, 37, to two, while they were working at Witherwack home in Sunderland.

They were both sentenced to a year's jail, suspended for six months, at Newcastle Crown Court.
Nightmare in care

BLEAK and forbidding rooms...flimsy furniture, bedrooms smelling of urine...

Allegations that a care assistant had sex with a 14-year-old boy...assaults by staff...encouragement of youngsters to fight each other...

Mismanagement...inexperienced staff...lack of training...kangaroo courts.

This is the nightmarish picture not of a prison camp or a grim Dickensian institution but of life in some of Sunderland's children's homes as we near the end of the 20th Century.

It has been drawn not by some agitating pressure group or rabble-rousing TV programme but in a frank and damning report by the Social Services Inspectorate about conditions at three homes, and by two young men who have spoken to the Echo about their experiences.

There could be court action. Files have been sent to the Crown Prosecution Service.

Damages claims are being considered.

But top priority must be given to putting right what is so clearly wrong.

The SSI concentrated on three homes. It says 57 changes should be made within the next few months.

The appalling possibility exists that similar abuses could be taking place in all 12 council homes, as Social Services Director Roy Perker sensibly accepts.

The council must now take the initiative. It must stop trying to blame the media for problems which are a matter of acute public interest.

It must set out to ensure that all its homes perform to a high standard the compassionate service for which they were created - caring for youngsters who have already suffered the torment of a disturbed childhood.
NEW DEMAND FOR PROBE INTO CHILD CARE

SUNDERLAND Tories have repeated their demand for a public inquiry over allegations of child abuse in council-run homes.

Social services spokesman Isabell Graham first called for the inquiry after it was revealed police were investigating claims that children had been physically and sexually abused while in the care of the local authority.

Three men and a woman have so far been questioned by police over allegations.

The woman and two of the men were sacked in 1987 over allegations of sexual and physical abuse.

The third man is still employed by the council in one of its 12 homes.

The 1987 sackings were not reported to police, but this only came to light when the Department of Health Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) arrived to carry out in-depth checks on three homes run by the borough.

Coun Graham put social services chairman Coun Eric Timmins in the hot seat by demanding to know when an internal inquiry became a police matter and why police were not called in in 1987.

Coun Timmins said procedures covered allegations of misconduct. These included suspension or sacking of staff if necessary.

"It must not have been deemed necessary at the time to call in the police. The staff were dealt with under local government rule books."

Coun Timmins condemned media handling of the care crisis and said the result was children in homes were being stigmatised by others.

MEDIA TRIAL

"One child has already written to John Major over press handling of the issue. Trial by media is not and never will be the way to deal with this situation."

He said he did not believe a public inquiry was in the best interests of children in care, but Coun Graham was free to suggest that at next week's health care and general sub-committee.

The SSI report on the three homes will be presented to councillors on Tuesday and five of the inspectors will he on hand to discuss its contents, he added.

Coun Bill Hilton demanded to know when the appointment of Roy Parker as director of social services would be notified to full council.

He took over after Colin Smart's shock decision to quit the job he had held for just a year.
Confidence vote for abuse investigator

By GARY WELFORD, Crime Reporter

WEARSIDE's police chief has given a vote of confidence to the senior detective leading the inquiry into alleged abuse in children's homes.

Social services staff say there has been a breakdown in the relationship between social workers and police, with child care suffering as a result.

The claim was made after Det Chief Insp Dave Wilson, head of Sunderland's child protection unit, launched an inquiry into child abuse.

A letter circulated to members of the white collar union Naico, which represents social workers, singled out the experienced detective for criticism.

It said social services staff enjoyed an excellent relationship with the police prior to his appointment, but had "great concerns" for working together if he continued in office.

But Chief Supt Ted Holder, Wearside's divisional commander, declared: "I have total confidence in him."

"He was tasked with heading this inquiry, which has been ongoing for some time, because he is a senior detective."

"He was following up a line of inquiry highlighted by the Social Services Inspectorate as an area of concern in its report into the homes."

"The Crown Prosecution Service has a close interest and is liaising closely with the police over the inquiry."

"I have total confidence in the skills and ability of Mr Wilson in his handling of a very difficult and sensitive issue."

Mr Holder, who has had clear-the-air talks with Sunderland Council chief executive Geoffrey Key and social services officials, insisted there was no witch hunt being conducted against the department.

"We are both professional organisations and we cannot afford to fall out over this."

"When it comes down to it, we are both concerned about the welfare of people who are vulnerable."
SOCIAL workers on Wearside are claiming child care is suffering through a breakdown in relations with police.

Social service staff, including members of the white collar union Nalgo, met to discuss claims of a rift with the police's child protection unit.

Social workers are said to be uneasy following the launch of a child abuse inquiry by police.

Nalgo's Wearside branch secretary Bob Scott said: "There was a breakdown in the relationship between police and the department.

"I am not blaming the police. But while this is going on children are not being given priority."

At the meeting, a letter circulated to Nalgo members highlighted Detective Chief Inspector Dave Wilson, the head of Sunderland's police child protection unit.

It stated: "Nalgo note the previous excellent relationship with the police prior to the appointment of DCI Wilson and have great concerns for 'working together' with his continuance in office."

The letter added members had considered boycotting child protection work following the arrests and questioning of some social workers.

The arrests of five social workers amid allegations of sexual and physical abuse is said to have sent shock waves through the Sunderland department.

An ex-employee is alleged to have had sex with a 14-year-old boy at a council-run children's home.

Two other social workers are alleged to have incited youngsters to violence. A spokesman for the social services department declined to comment.

Barry Bancroft, Northumbria deputy chief constable, said: "It is clear the author of the letter misunderstands the level of cooperation between the police and social services."
YOUTH ACCUSED OF NINE SEX CASES

By BARBARA McCLENNAN
Municipal Editor

COMMITTAL papers have been prepared in the case of a 15-year-old boy accused of nine serious sex offences.
The offences are said to be against fellow residents of a Sunderland children's home.
The boy made another brief appearance at Sunderland juvenile court today to hear magistrates adjourn the case for two weeks for formal committal proceedings.

Among the offences alleged to have been committed by the boy are two rapes, indecently assaulting three girls and two boys, another serious sexual offence and committing an act of indecency with another boy.
The boy's alleged victims are as young as six, and the offences are said to have been committed as far back as January 1990.

He was originally charged with three offences, including rape, said to have been committed in October last year when he was living in a children's home on Wearside.
The boy was only moved to Aycliffe secure unit after his first court appearance in January.

That was brought about after the Social Services Inspectorate alerted social services chiefs over possible cases of abuse which had gone uninvestigated by police.

That led to an on-going police inquiry being launched by Det Chief Insp David Wilson, head of Northumbria's child protection squad.
BARBARA McCLENNAN REPORTS FROM SUNDERLAND COUNCIL

ROW ERUPTS OVER REFUGE CASH LEAK

THE leaking of a confidential report on the financial affairs of Sunderland battered wives' refuge led to angry exchanges in the city council chamber.

The report highlighted wage rises without noticeable increases in responsibility to a staff member, and auditors found a cash surplus when the refuge was widely believed to be under-funded.

Liberal Coun Win Lundgren, a member of the refuge's management committee, demanded an explanation from social services chairman Coun Eric Timmins on how the report, drawn up by departmental boss Roy Parker, was leaked to the Press in contravention to 1985's Access to Information Act.

Coun Timmins said he did not know but had received assurances from social services officers that they had not breached the Act.

Whoever leaked the report, he added, had shown a "callous disregard of both the Act and protection of the rights of the individual".

Tory Coun Margaret Forbes asked what input the council had in the appointment of staff or how much they were paid.

Coun Timmins bitterly criticised Coun Forbes, saying "to ask this question is little short of criminal.

"Everybody knows voluntary agencies are autonomous and not responsible to this authority.

SERVICE

"We rely totally on voluntary organisations for provision of some services we are unable to provide.

"This refuge has provided a service for the city for 15 years."

"The report addressed issues of a financial nature and comments made in it must be seen in relation to the service's output."

DEMANDING ANSWERS ... Coun Win Lundgren

BITTERLY CRITICAL ... Coun Eric Timmins
TORY BLAST OVER ABUSE 'COVER-UP'

SUNDERLAND'S controlling Labour group was last night accused of "sweeping under the carpet" facts surrounding the police inquiry into child abuse at the city's children's homes.

Tory councillor Margaret Forbes demanded that a critical Social Services Inspectorate report, which triggered police involvement, be brought to the council for full debate.

Until it does, the Tory group is effectively gagged from debating its contents or the allegations of physical and psychological abuse uncovered by the six Department of Health inspectors.

But social services chairman Coun Eric Timmins said the report had been dealt with by his committee and it was not a matter of full council concern.

Coun Forbes challenged: "Are you saying that this council is not supposed to be interested in children we have taken into care to protect?"

She accused the Labour party of trying to hide the facts surrounding the inquiry, launched several months ago by Det Chief Insp Dave Wilson, head of Northumbria Police's child protection unit.

So far police have interviewed six former or existing social services staff over allegations of abuse of children in their care.

SLIPPED

A 13-year-old boy is also facing charges of nine sex offences committed against children as young as six while he was in care.

Coun Timmins claimed the cases investigated by Mr Wilson had merely "slipped through the net" was untrue, she said.

"Would you not consider swept under the carpet a more accurate description of the management of the whole affair?"

But Coun Timmins warned that anyone leaking information to the Press could face legal action.

"The council has not made any public statement, nor would it ever wish to do so, since there is a duty of confidentiality."

"This authority has never swept anything under the carpet on the issues of children."

By BARBARA McCLENNAN, Municipal Editor
ANOTHER GREAT NORTHERN EXCLUSIVE

PROBE LAUNCHED AFTER FEARS KIDS HOMES WERE...

By NIGEL GREEN

A SECRET investigation was launched last night into children’s homes run by a North council.

A crack team of police, child protection officers and Government inspectors are digging through records going back 10 years.

ABUSE

They will investigate accusations of...

- SEX between youngsters in care.
- CLAUSES of sexual abuse on children by former staff.
- LAX discipline in homes.
- RUNAWAYS creating a mini-crime wave.

The probe follows an investigation by the Sunday Sun last year which revealed a catalogue of disturbing allegations about homes run by Labour-controlled Sunderland Council.

The Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) have now entered a searching inquiry.

It will be carried out by a team of 10 social workers backed up by their own inspectors drawn from across the region.

EVIDENCE

The police inquiry is being led by Detective Chief Inspector Dave Wilson, of Sunderland CID, who heads the child protection squad.

Last night it emerged the major investigation was launched after a routine inquiry by the SSI found evidence that staff "lacked guidance and control."

That inquiry involved 12 homes where 200 children were in care.

News of the stunning report was leaked last week after Cllr Stuart, the director of social

THE DAIHATSU SPORTRAK WERE

INVESTIGATING... Dave Wilson.

POLICE MOVE IN AFTER REPORT SLAMS COUNCIL

SUNDERLAND a year ago after moving from South Tyneside.

The investigation came as a shock to social workers across the region.

“11 is a tragedy. It is probably one of the best social services directors in the country,” said Northumberland’s chief John Bovett.

Among the homes social workers探访ed were Wirral Community, in the Wirral, and Wirral Community, in Wirral.

And the inquiry into the care of a child in Sunderland Council.

PROTECTION

Mr Wilson said: “We have a matter of policy, I don’t discuss child protection cases.”

And the social work team, working from an office adjoining an old school house in nearby Houghton, have been told to remove tight-lipped

There are NO allegations that the current staff have been abusing the children and nobody has been suspended.

But in four years there have been at least 20 reports of sexual abuse by staff at children’s homes and centres for the mentally handicapped in Sunderland.

INDECENCY

These include a female member of staff seen with a boy from a Wearside home after claims that she had sex with a 14-year-old boy.

The boss of Thorncliffe children’s home, who is also a member of Sunderland Social Services Committee, said: “There is always a concern in an SSI report.”

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THREE former care staff are to be prosecuted after a lengthy police inquiry into alleged abuse at a Sunderland children's home.

The ex-members of staff from Witherwack House have been summoned to appear before magistrates later this month.

The trio - named by police as Kevin Rolfe, 28, Alan Dingwall, 33, and Glynis Tamblyn, 36 - will face charges concerning alleged cruelty to children.

A statement issued by Northumbria Police today said: "Following inquiries into events in 1987 at Witherwack House children's home, three people have been summoned for offences concerning alleged cruelty to children."

It added: "All have left the employment of Sunderland Social Services. These matters are now sub-judice and no further police comment will be made."

The news is the latest development in the scandal which has rocked the city council's social services department in recent months.

It comes only days after councillors agreed to make sweeping changes in the way its children's homes are run following a report from childcare expert Emlyn Cassam.

He was called in by the council after a report by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) highlighted allegations of physical and sexual abuse in homes.

Seven people were arrested in all, and other files are still being considered by the Crown Prosecution Service.

In addition, a 15-year-old boy has been sent for crown court trial on sex charges.
TORY BLAST OVER ABUSE ‘COVER-UP’

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Coun Forbes challenged: "Are you saying that this council is not supposed to be interested in children we have taken into care to protect?"

She accused the Labour party of trying to hide the facts surrounding the inquiry, launched several months ago by Det Chief Insp Dave Wilson, head of Northumbria Police's child protection unit.

So far police have interviewed six former or existing social services staff over allegations of abuse of children in their care.

"SLIPPED"

A 13-year-old boy is also facing charges of nine offences committed against children as young as six while he was in care.

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But Coun Timmins warned that anyone leaking information to the Press could face legal action.

"The council has not made any public statement, nor would it ever wish to do so, since there is a duty of confidentiality."

"This authority has never swept anything under the carpet on the issues of children."
Abuse inquiry police rift fuels child care fears

Exclusive by PATRICK LAVALLE

A BREAKDOWN in the relationship between police and social services department at the centre of an abuse inquiry is having an effect on the quality of care for children, it was claimed last night.

And social workers in Sunderland have expressed "grave concerns" about working with police in child abuse cases while a top detective remains in his job.

The rift between the city's social services department and Sunderland police's child protection unit is growing deeper and more than 150 of the department's staff - including most of the city's social workers - met last night to discuss their concerns.

The secret meeting followed the arrest of a high-ranking social worker on Wearside and the questioning of his 40-year-old female colleague.

Sunderland's director of social services Roy Parker was quizzed by worried staff over the police handling of an inquiry into allegations of child abuse and neglect.

The latest arrests follow the questioning by police of five other workers, who are or were employed by the city's social services department, over allegations of physical and sexual abuse.

One of the past employees - a female care assistant - is alleged to have had sex with a 14-year-old boy in a council-run children's home. Two of her male colleagues are alleged to have incited youngsters to violence.

A file on those allegations - which date back to 1987 - has been handed to the Crown Prosecution Service.

The ongoing police inquiry is said to have undermined confidence within the department and union members want agencies involved in child abuse to come together and share information.

A letter was circulated to all members of the union Naigo who attended the crisis meeting yesterday.

One of the claims it made was: "Naigo note the previous excellent relationship with the police prior to the appointment of DCI Wilson and have grave concerns for working together with his continuance in office."

Detective Chief Inspector Wilson, the head of Sunderland police's child protection unit, has repeatedly declined to comment over the concerns expressed by Naigo. He was not available for comment last night.

The letter said members had considered boycotting child protection work as a result of the arrests, but no decision had yet been made.

Naigo's Wearside branch secretary Bob Scott said last night: "There has been a breakdown in the relationship between police and the department.

"I am not blaming the police. But while this is going on children are not being given priority."

Bid to stop the vicious circle

A project in the North-East to help children who have been sexually abused or neglected may help prevent the victims becoming abusers themselves.

A disturbing report published today by the National Children's Home suggests the number of children who sexually abuse other youngsters may be much higher than people think.

But the evidence is many may have been abused themselves, pointing to a more urgent need than ever to provide help and treatment for victims of child abuse.

In Sunderland, where council-run children's homes have hit the headlines in recent months because of allegations of physical and sexual abuse of some youngsters, the National Children's Home is planning a special centre to try to tackle the problem.

Part of a £4m initiative by the charity to open a network of centres across the country, it will provide treatment and counselling for sexually abused children, and will also be supported by the health authority and social services.

"They will work with children within the context of the family to overcome some of the problems that can arise when children have been abused," said MCI regional spokesman David Tebb.

Russian girl's aid thank you

A YOUNG Russian girl who benefited from some of the aid sent by County Durham folk to their twin town of Kostroma, has sent a touching note of thanks.

Ann Barilo, six, was one of the children who received toys from the convoy of aid to the town, north-east of Moscow, last month.

"Goodbye, Ann. I love you."

In her to Durham County Council she wrote: "Hello, my dear friends.

"My name is Ann. I am six. I have mother, father and brother. His name is Viva. He is 14.

"I received a bear-cub, a little doll and a cat. I like it.

"Goodbye, Ann. I love you."

The letter reached the right hands against all the odds - it was addressed to "Count Darum, Council of Countryside."

Tony Surcliffe, the county council's international exchange officer, said it showed the huge amount of aid donated by thousands in County Durham had reached the right people.
FURY AS POLICE ARREST A BOSS

A STORM has erupted after the arrest of a North social services chief in front of startled workmates.

Detectives probing accusations of child abuse at Sunderland council-run homes swooped on the boss of Washington area office.

Area controller Bob Hearn was taken in for questioning for several hours.

NEGLECT

He was later released from police bail and allowed back to work. But a row has been sparked by the police handling of the arrest of the SEVENTH and most senior in the inquiry. Councillor Eric Timmins, chairman of the social services committee, said: "His fellow social workers are not happy with what's going on and I sympathise with them totally."

"If the police are going to arrest people, they should at least do it away from work."

Meanwhile, dozens of NASGO members met at Sunderland civic centre last week after the arrest of a 40-year-old female social worker from Washington.

The woman was "very distressed" after being questioned by detectives over allegations of neglect.

Northumbria Police's child protection squad was brought in to investigate claims of sexual and physical abuse last year.

SACRED

The inquiry was launched after the Sunderland Sun revealed there still had been attacks on a children's home in 1987. Despite criminal allegations against the staff, detectives were not informed by the council.

The three sacked staff, as well as other workers at the homes, have since been arrested.

Dasa way to do it, mum!

DASA makes her zoo debut. The newborn Bornean Orangutan, clung to her mother Doris's back when she made her first public appearance at the Lowery Park Zoo in Tampa Bay, Florida, Orlando.

Born on April 1, she was kept in private quarters at the zoo until now.
Top social services boss to stand down

By LINDA CALLAGHAN
County Affairs Correspondent

A TOP social services chief announced last night he is standing down because of the pressures of change and lack of cash in local government.

News that Sunderland's social services director Colin Smart is to quit at the end of February, after 28 years in the business, shocked his colleagues in other authorities around the region.

"It is a tragedy. He is probably one of the best social services directors in the country," said Northumberland's chief John Bennett.

Others praised his dedication and loyalty and said they were stunned to hear his decision.

Sunderland Borough Council issued a statement late yesterday saying 52-year-old Mr Smart had asked the council to grant him early retirement because he felt he could no longer cope with the demands of the job.

"The task of implementing the Children Act as well as the NHS and Community Care Act, while providing quality services within an increasingly tight financial framework, has become too much for me," he said in the statement.

Meanwhile the borough's deputy director of social services Roy Parker has been appointed to take over Mr Smart's role, subject to approval by councillors next week.

Mr Smart was appointed director at Sunderland where the social services budget is currently £27.3m a year, over 12 months ago.

Prior to the move he held the same post at South Tyneside for 18 years.

A council spokesman said Mr Smart believed his decision would be in the best future interests of social services in Sunderland and that he wished to publicly thank the council for granting his request.

Mr Smart, who is married with two teenage children, was out of the area and not contactable.

Coun Eric Timmins, chairman of the social services committee said Mr Smart's job is now one of the most difficult in local government.

"The extraordinary number of changes in directors up and down the country over the last few years is proof of that. Colin Smart has all my sympathy," he said.

"He has given a lot to the job. He believes that is still not enough and I respect his judgement."

Peter Kemp, social services director for Durham County Council said as one of the country's longest serving directors Colin Smart had been through many complex and difficult organisational changes in the work.

"I can understand the personal toll which the continuing pressures of the job will have taken on him."

"There will be a large number of people of all ages throughout the region who have at one time or another benefited from his dedication and commitment."

Northern chairman of the Association of Social Services' Directors, Gateshead's chief, David Stephenson said the spotlight had been turned more on social services directors in recent years particularly with cases like the Cleveland and Orkneys sex abuse controversies.

"People expect a much higher quality of services, and rightly so but it is difficult always to live up to them," he said.
Police quiz care worker for hours

ANOTHER ARREST IN ABUSE PROBE

POLICE have arrested a fifth care worker as part of their continued investigation into child abuse in Sunderland children's homes.

The man was arrested on Friday and questioned for several hours about allegations that he abused a child in his care in one of Sunderland's 12 residential units.

He was eventually released on police bail without charge.

The second person to be arrested in Sunderland for alleged child abuse while still working for city social services several years after incidents allegedly took place.

The man was originally suspended from his post in May last year to allow investigations to take place after he was accused of striking a child.

He is still working for social services, a council spokesman admitted today, but has been moved to a job where he no longer comes into contact with children.

Chief Inspector Dave Watson, head of Sunderland's child protection unit, today confirmed the latest arrest came as a result of his team's on-going inquiries.

So far the police probe centres on allegations of both physical and sexual abuse of youngsters by staff at one particular home in the town.

CHECKS

It was launched after the Department of Health's Social Services Inspectorate arrived to carry out detailed checks on three children's homes.

Inspectors unearthed the sacking of two men and a woman care worker from one home in 1987 which had mysteriously gone unreported to police.

The woman was sacked over allegations that she sexually abused a youngster in her care.

The two men were dismissed after youngsters revealed a reign of terror in the same home. They both allegedly physically abused children and incited them to attack each other in the home.

This latest arrest is not thought to be connected with the 1987 incidents but came to light as police trawled through records for that home going back five years.

Detectives expect to hand over their first file to the Crown Prosecution Service in the near future with several others following later.

By BARBARA McCLENNAN
Municipal Editor

Short cut tragedy

Two teenagers — including a 17-year-old judo champion — were killed when they tried to take a short cut across a busy motorway.

Andrew Cooper, of Pine Wood Rd, Sandfields, High Wycombe, Bucks, been to a party and was crossing M40 motorway with the girlfriend of another party-goer.

Emir approves budget

The Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmed al-Sabah, has approved a long-delayed budget, projecting a record deficit of more than £10 billion in the first full fiscal year since the Gulf war.

Economists say the bulk of the deficit is due to increased military spending to about five times the level before Iraq's seven-month occupation.

Good for business

Theme parks Alton Towers and Chessington were likely to benefit from next month's opening of the EuroDisney complex near Paris, it was claimed today.

The Pearson group's chief executive in charge of its entertainments division said the French theme park would boost the market for similar complexes in the UK.
SOCIAL service chiefs are investigating a Wearside woman’s allegations that she suffered long-term sexual abuse by a care worker in a council-run children’s home.

The 20-year-old woman says she first complained of physical violence by a woman care worker three years ago, but claims she was ignored.

A year later she told social workers of the sex abuse, but says her claims were dismissed.

Now she has come forward herself to repeat her complaints after reading in the Echo of the setting up of a top level council team.

That is being led by Margaret Saunders, head of Sunderland Council’s child protection unit.

The council has given assurances that the team will trawl through five years of records in its search for any unidentified cases of abuse of youngsters in its care.

But the woman says no one had asked to hear her story until she made contact with social services.

REBELLIous

“ar was rebellious, angry and confused when I was in care.

“I was put into care to get away from the violence and sex abuse I’d endured for years at the hands of my stepfather.

“Instead of being cared for, I was abused still further and the more I kicked against the system the less they cared.

“They just didn’t realise that I couldn’t cope with any more threats.

“T’d lived with them since I was four-years-old and had got my first beating. I ran away repeatedly but they never asked why, never tried to understand.”

A Sunderland Council spokesman said: “We can confirm that a residential member of staff was dismissed for professional misconduct following disclosure of a consenting relationship with an adult who had previously been in the care of the authority.

“The officer concerned appealed through the normal channels but his appeal was dismissed.”

GILL is just 20-years-old and a seven-and-a-half months pregnant unmarried mum-to-be.

Despite her youth, however, she has arrived on the doorstep of a dozen women’s refuges seeking an escape from the men in her life.

She is now living at a secret address in Sunderland, awaiting allocation of a house outside the area.

Throughout her young life Gill has fallen victim to men who have abused the trust she mistakenly placed in them.

She got her first beating at the age of four. By the time she was seven a cycle of sexual abuse was added to her trauma.

SLEEPING ROUGH

From the age of seven Gill was running away from home, sleeping rough in a shelter at Seahorn. Her stepfather branded her disruptive.

At ten she finally called for help from social services. They took her under their wing, but left her at home. The abuse intensified.

Finally Gill was put into residential care.

She says that on weekend visits home parental abuse continued.

“I never told. I was too terrified. He said he’d kill me.

“I just bottles up the anger and fear, and nobody ever tried to find out why I was acting the way I did.”

Instead she ran. At one stage she spent three years on the run living in South Shields. She was just 12 years old.

Shortly before she was 16, police caught up with her. She was returned to the same home.

Then she went back to live with her family, only to suffer further abuse. That culminated, she says, in her stepfather raping her in a drunken rage.

“I went back to square one and ended up back in the council home again.”

She did the “odd runner” until a holiday trip to Berwick on her 17th birthday.

That trip, says Gill, turned sour during a night out in a pub with staff and other residents.

SEEKING REFUGE

She says a drunken woman worker put her arm around her.

“The next thing I knew she was pulling my arm around my throat and I was going purple.”

Gill escaped and ended up seeking refuge in a local hospital.

She says she complained about the treatment, but nothing happened to the worker involved.

Shortly after she turned 18 Gill moved into a council flat near the home.

Within weeks a care worker from the home was visiting her.

Gill says they became close friends and struck up a sexual relationship.

“I didn’t want it to happen but he wouldn’t listen. Because all the threats I’d had as a child I couldn’t say no. I was just too frightened. He even threatened to kill himself if I told anyone.

“It went on for several months and, looking back, I believe he sexually abused me.”

Gill complained, the worker was suspended and finally sacked. No-one from social services told her what happened. She says she heard it from friends.
Ex-kids in care may sue council

A NORTHS council at the centre of a child abuse scandal may be sued by the former children in care.

Detectives are still probing claims that 14 girls and a woman were sexually assaulted in the care of the council.

The Social Services Inspectorate reported in September that the council investigated the abuse "inadequately".

The council's press officer would not comment on the allegations.

Detectives are thought to be preparing charges.

A statement in the council's newsletter said there was "no basis" to any of the allegations.

SUNDAY SUN, 8.3.92
Full investigation of child abuse

The woman calling in my

If it comes to light that other children were

obviously investigate these cases too.

In 1975 the potential was there for

Investigation into what happened to

the child. The potential was there for

this investigation to proceed. It was

an important stage in this investigation.

That is why I feel strongly that we

should have a full investigation into

these cases.

The investigation into the death of the

child should be extended to include

other children who may have been

at risk. This would provide valuable

information for future investigations.

I believe that a full investigation is

necessary to ensure justice for all

involved.
Witherwack House: the report said the use of restraint on children living there was 'akin to assault'.

Local authorities to implement it.

The SSI report on Sunderland repeatedly criticises the lack of training and experience of staff looking after children in the authority's care.

It says that in one of the homes – Witherwack House – the use of restraint on children was "akin to assault".

Bert Smith, Sunderland branch secretary of the National Union of Public Employees, said staff were not sure of what to do in situations where unruly children needed to be checked.

In law a reasonable parent has the right to chastise their child. In children's homes staff have a "higher responsibility" than the reasonable parent.

Mr Parker agrees that staff at Witherwack House used excessive force in restraining children. That was because the staff were not adequately trained.

Only eight out of the 12 children's homes in Sunderland now have a qualified officer in charge. "This is a national pattern reflected here in Sunderland," said Mr Parker.

Ten to 15 years ago 35pc of children placed in care in Sunderland were later fostered – the vast majority young "normal" children who would fit in with families. Today, he said, the number had risen to 70pc and the pattern remained the same – would-be parents wanted to foster young children and not the older teenagers.

Care homes were left with children nobody wanted – teenagers considered unruly and disruptive. He added: "Older children coming into care also do not want to go to foster parents in many cases."

Labour's spokesperson for children, Joan Lester MP, said last night: "It is no good piling responsibilities on local authorities if they do not have access to appropriate funds to put principles into practice."

A spokesman for the Department of Health said: "We have asked the local authority to consider the report and report back to the SSI on what action it proposes to remedy the situation as a matter of urgency."

The department did not follow correct procedures in bringing possible abuse to the attention of police in 1987.

Sunderland social services director Roy Parker
Experts say the children's home crisis is not just confined to Sunderland

This is a national problem

A DAMNING report on the running of children's homes in Sunderland has led to a public outcry about child care and the use of restraint. The authority has been ordered to review how it looks after children as a matter of urgency. The demoralising picture of abuse, lack of staff training and inadequate facilities painted by the report is not peculiar to Wearside, according to leading experts in the field. Reporter Patrick Lavelle examines the root causes of the problems and the events leading up to the crisis.

An increasing number of children in care are not 'youngersters' abandoned by their parents but violent teenagers out of their control.

The situation has arisen because would-be parents are keen to foster 'normal' children but reluctant to take on older children with behaviour problems.

And these youngsters are being cared for by inexperienced, unqualified staff, who, when confronted with violence, do not know how to handle the situation.

These are the views of the country's longest serving director of social services, Brian Roycroft, from Newcastle's City Council.

His views were echoed by the director of Sunderland social services, Roy Parker, who admitted that his department did not follow the correct procedures in bringing possible abuse to the attention of police in 1987.

Mr Roycroft, union leaders, and local and national politicians specialising in child care agree that the crisis in children's homes is not isolated to Sunderland.

Sunderland social services - at the centre of a police probe into alleged sexual and physical abuse in children's homes - was severely criticised by the Social Services Inspectorate.

Mr Parker admits the SSI criticisms are "justified".

But Sunderland, according to Mr Roycroft, is not alone. Wearside's problems may be worse than other areas but the crisis is a national problem which can only be tackled by an increase in training and experience of staff.

A report into residential care services children by the former chief inspector of the SSI, Sir William Utting, a 70% of staff employed in children's homes are unqualified.

The type of children in care has changed dramatically during the last 20 years but the management of homes has not kept pace.

"Child care is given "low esteem" and the skills and difficulties associated with the care and control of emotionally disturbed children are "exceptional", says the report.

Mr Roycroft, the past president of the Association of Directors of Social Services, pointed out that the type of children in care during the past 20 years has changed "dramatically".

But the management of homes nationally has not kept pace with the changes, resulting in the crisis in care, typified in Sunderland.

He said the Children Act was "a good thing" but the Government would have to provide a steady stream of cash to
Vorn out by a year on Wearside

in Smart has been around the all services scene for a long time. A 18 years as director of Southside under his belt he moved to the role last year to head
land’s much larger SSD.

It was a shock when after only a month in the post and at the age of 52, he said he could no longer cope with the demands of the job.

But all the residential care crisis unsolved, Sunderland needs a full-scale investigation, arrest of four care workers and a critical report on the homes. A report appearing on a dozen social workers. So why did he suddenly call it a day?

The answer scents energy crisis and other weather all storm clouds bad, he really out of steam, it he see the ending crisis to hit Sunder
and’s residential care and his reputation too.

if there is some conflict between newly-appointed director, determined to sweep out every blemish in social services, and insiders or outsiders? Or did he feel

because of his own investigation and concern about adequate protection, the only way he

get change was by leaving the post?

The only public comment from him so far was his sudden departure comes in a council press re

The task of implementing legislation while providing services comes in an increasingly financial framework, has been too much for me.

Local services committee chairman he was working 70 hours a week and appeared ‘overstretched’ as he moved from second to first division social services.

He tends to run things himself rather than delegate. You may be able to do that in South Tyneside but not in an authority the size of Sunderland,” said one member.

Smart has spoken about his long social services career but will not publicly discuss his troubled year in Sunderland.

A quick review of his career shows extensive experience of child care.

Smart’s early retirement after only a year in Sunderland

He held posts in the West Riding, East and Oxfordshire children’s departments before becoming assistant director in Cheshire in 1971 and then moving to South Tyneside as director.

In the early 1980s, he was on the panel of a child care inquiry into the serious neglect which led to the death of a Besley child, Lucy Gates.

Smart was vice-president of the Association of Child Care Officers before it merged into BASW in the early seventies. He was then the first chairman of its family and child care section. This wide experience proves Smart was no novice, but leaves more questions unanswered about his decision to leave Sunderland.

Smart has also been extensively involved in work on drugs misuse, both in the north east and nationally, for the Drug Advisory Service.

In the current situation in Sunderland, it is worth remembering that through the latter work he was seconded through the SSD on four separate occasions, to undertake this inspecting role on drugs misuse.

Because of the experience on the inspection side, one has a way of looking at things which can be applied to working life, he says.

Smart was also founder member of the Local Authority Drugs Forum, and he sat on the Advisory Council on Drugs Misuse which advises government on the problems of drugs and AIDS.

For the immediate future, Smart has no alternative full-time job lined up but hopes to pursue his interests in the field of drugs misuse. He plans to take some time off and perhaps write a book.

A year on Wearside along the lines of Peter Mayle’s ‘A Year in Provence’ is one idea.

Meanwhile back at Sunderland SSD, former deputy director Roy Parker has taken over as director. Former director of Norfolk SSD, Emlyn Cassam, is to carry out a review of the residential child care services in the city, looking in particular at the management structure of the department.

Smart is a self-confessed workaholic and staff talk of receiving computer print-outs with the time of 2am at the top of the paper.

‘Those who have accused me of being addicted to work are not too far wrong,’ he says.

‘It is well known I am notorious for sending memos at weekends or bank holidays. I have even been known to write a memo over Christmas,’ he says.

His family, if no one else will be glad he has taken early retirement.

Carolina Marchant
Abuse complaints check at children’s homes after arrests

A COUNCIL is studying previous allegations of abuse at its children’s homes after police arrested and questioned a social worker and three former staff.

Social workers in Sunderland are checking records of young people in care over the past seven years to see if complaints were acted on.

The move follows the leaking of a draft Social Services inspectorate report critical of council child care.

It shows that social services failed to give police details of alleged assaults, and is understood to have found evidence of a “repressive” regime.

Social services inspectors were asked to investigate the running of three Sunderland children’s homes following government calls for tighter checks on residential care in the wake of the pin down scandal in Staffordshire.

An examination of records at one of the homes — Witherwick House — disclosed that two men and a woman were dismissed in 1997 in two separate incidents of alleged abuse, but police were not told.

The men were alleged to have inflicted children to violence, while the woman allegedly allowed a 14-year-old boy to fondle her breasts.

Police questioned the three two weeks ago.

In a separate incident, a boy who was formerly in council care claims a social worker hit him in 1989.

Police questioned the man last week. An investigation has been launched by the council, which has suspended him on full pay.

A council spokesman said a team of six social workers was working full time sifting through youngsters’ files.

“We are checking where there were allegations of abuse. These are passed to police,” he said.

“At the same time, we want to see that if allegations are made they were picked up by social workers at the time.”

Action was already being taken on the report, which was to be published in a few weeks.
COUNCIL UNDER FIRE AS FOUR ARE BAILED IN LATEST HOMES SCANDAL

Care staff arrested in child abuse probe

By ALISON GORDON

FOUR former social workers have been arrested in connection with an investigation into physical and sexual abuse at children's homes.

The move comes as a Government report on the running of the Sunderland council homes is set to be published next week.

A leaked draft of the report condemns the council for:
- implementing a "repressive regime";
- failing to give adequate management guidance and control; and
- providing general child care below an acceptable standard over the last decade.

The Social Services Inspectorate launched an inquiry after Government calls for tighter checks in the wake of abuse scandals in Leicestershire and Staffordshire. Three of the suspects, now on police bail, were dismissed from Witherspark House in 1987 following allegations of physical and sexual abuse.

Sunderland social services admit they failed to inform the police of the allegations at the time.

The fourth suspect was working at the home until arrested last week. The two other homes investigated by the SSI were Avenue Vivian in Penzance, and Wellesley School in Blyth.

An SSI spokesman said last night: "The report has raised concerns about children's homes relating to child sexual and physical abuse. It is being considered by the local authority and we are in close contact with them about how they can best implement the report's recommendations."

The police investigation was launched after social services director Colin Smart and the SSI expressed their concern.

Mr Smart, 52, is taking early retirement at the end of the month after under a year in the job. His decision is believed to be connected to his frustrated efforts to improve running of the homes. At the time of his retirement announcement he said he could no longer cope with the demands of the job. He was unable to comment last night.

In response to recommendations outlined by the SSI, Sunderland has called in an independent adviser to review residential child care services.

A spokesman for the council said last night: "The SSI has indicated problems that we need to address and that is what we are doing."

Social workers involved in a Leicestershire child abuse scandal are to be re-investigated by their employers.

County council officials will follow up a police inquiry which led to Frank Beck being jailed last year for abusing young people and colleagues at three homes in his charge.

Detectives have been asked for evidence of practices that were being unlawful, but might constitute a disciplinary offence.

Union officials say the move is "unfair" and may make staff reluctant to give full evidence to a Government inquiry set to begin this month. Of 120 council staff interviewed by police in the Beck inquiry, 80 have left their jobs.
New child care scandal shakes social services

BY CATRIONA MARCHANT

A major investigation has been launched by police and the SSI into allegations of physical and sexual abuse of young people in Sunderland children's homes over ten years.

Sunderland police's child protection unit has received four formal care workers at Withwick House in the city, and the SSI is investigating all the authority's 12 children's homes.

Community Care understands that the SSI was called in last April by the newly-appointed social services director Colin Smart following concerns about protection of children in the homes. It is now understood that Smart's sudden retirement from his post earlier this month was directly linked to these concerns.

The Sunderland investigation follows the recent scandal of abuses by Frank Beck in Leicestershire children's homes, and will intensify fears that Beck's is not an isolated case.

In Sunderland, a leaked draft report from the SSI on three homes is understood to refer to a 'repressive regime' at Withwick, and to lack of management guidance and control.

Three of the four arrested former workers were dismissed in 1987 because one of them, a woman, was accused of having sex with a 14-year-old boy, and two were accused of physically abusing children. The fourth was working at Withwick until his arrest last week.

The SSI admitted this week that police were not informed at the time of the alleged incidents in 1987. The police investigation was launched at the end of last year in response to concerns about the safety of children.

The three men and one woman arrested are on police bail, facing further questioning. Following a separate incident last year at Withwick, a 15-year-old boy has been charged with rape against young children at the home, and is awaiting trial.

Sunderland has called in Norfolk's former director of social services, Emlyn Gasam, as an independent adviser to look at residential child care services in the city and in particular the management structure of children's homes.

Roy Parker, now director of Sunderland SSD, said it was carrying out recommendations contained in the draft SSI report and lessons learned were being applied to all 12 homes.

The authority is currently working with the SSI to review staff training, use of restraint on young people, complaints procedures for children and decor and furnishing in the homes.

'We have serious problems to address and we are simply getting on with that task,' said Parker.

Care plans at risk over government cash delay

Local authority care plans for elderly people could be placed in jeopardy next year if the government further delays a decision on how much social security is to be transferred to each SSD in April 1995.

From this date, income support for elderly people needing residential care is to be paid by local authorities under the Community Care Act. Authorities were told by the DoH last year that the funding details would be made available by the end of 1991.

But it has now emerged that full details of what each authority will receive from the DSS are unlikely to be announced before November—almost a year late.

Social services directors, some of whom were told of the delay by DoH officials, are warning that they will be unable to plan and budget for the care needs of elderly people.

"In June this year my members will expect me to make hard spending proposals for 1994-5," said Chris Gottick, director of Westminster SSD.

"Without knowledge of DSS cash, we won't be able to plan care for elderly people moving from acute hospital beds into nursing care."

Even if the DSS is able to announce national funds to be transferred in July, this will not indicate a geographical breakdown for each authority.

Authorities fear that the total funds may fall short of the needs of elderly people because of the current gap between income support levels and the costs of residential care.

The Association of Metropolitan Authorities estimates the gap will rise above £900 million in 1995-6.

The Tory chairman of the Commons health committee, Nicholas Winterton MP, told BASW's London members last week that unless the shortfall is made up, 'chaos, confusion and mayhem' would ensue.

See Comment, page 11.

NHS backs down on joint training

The NHS appeared to swell its misgivings about joint qualifications for all unqualified care staff at an emergency meeting of the Care Sector Consortium this week.

NHS representatives said an internal consultation had revealed overwhelming support for integrated national vocational qualifications, with 80 per cent of its managers and trainers favouring the proposals.

The NHS was quite enthusiastic about the concept of going forward on integrated awards; a different response from what might have been expected," said Care Sector Consortium chairman Gareth Gibbitty.

Until now the NHS has been lukewarm about integrated awards, partly because some of its top management feared losing staff to better-paid local authority jobs. But it is believed to have bowed to pressure from the government, which has strongly backed integrated awards for the 300,000 care staff in the health and social services sectors.
FOURTH MAN QUizzED IN HOMES PROBE

By BARBARA McCLENNAN
Municipal Editor

POLICE probing the running of Sunderland children's homes have interviewed a fourth person in connection with allegations of child abuse.

Detectives questioned the man over the weekend about an allegation of abuse at a borough children's home before releasing him on bail. He has not been charged.

Earlier this month three former staff from the same home were questioned and also released on bail without charge. They are a woman employee who allegedly had sex with a 14-year-old in her care in 1987, and two male workers who were sacked in the same year amid allegations that they also abused children.

ENCOURAGED

The two men were sacked after allegations that they encouraged children to attack each other.

Police were called in to look at children's homes after a team from the Department of Health's Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) carried out detailed checks on three of the borough's 12 homes and residential units.

The SSI discovered details of the 1987 incidents had not been passed onto police and only internal council action taken.

Northumbria Police's inquiry is being carried out by Sunderland's child protection squad.

Last week the council announced it was calling in an outside expert to advise it on how to run its child care system.

Tories step up attack

The Tories stepped up their offensive today on what they claim is Labour's total subservience to the unions.

But Labour hit back with new allegations to support their claim that the Government is hell-bent on privatising the NHS.

The Tories have built up a dossier of what they claim is trade union domination and influence over Labour.

Labour launched a poster campaign producing evidence which they say proves they are in the business of privatising the health service.

'Racist police' charge

Two black people who claimed they were treated in a racist manner by the police today won £20,000 in an out-of-court settlement.

The agreed award to Rodney Pilgrim, 31, from Barbados, and his cousin Valerie Marche, 30, a contract furniture of Stratford, east London, was announced at Croydon County Court, south London.

An agreed statement read to Judge Goodman said an offer made by the Metropolitan Police had been accepted.

Assault case dropped

A charge against a husband accused of assaulting his ex-wife was dropped today.

Stephen Edwards, 36, of Henfield, West Sussex, appeared before a Sussex magistrate accused of assaulting the Rev Tom Tyler.

The clerk to the magistrates said the prosecution had served notice that the proceedings would be discontinued.
ARREST NO 4 IN PROBE AT KIDS' HOME

Detectives probing a child abuse scandal in the North have arrested a FOURTH suspect.

The man, a residential social worker, was also SUSPENDED from his job at a children’s home in Sunderland.

Police swooped on Friday after having already arrested two men and a woman who used to work at the home.

A fifth person, also employed as a residential social worker, was questioned before being allowed to return to his job.

The four suspects have not been charged and are on police bail as child protection officers continue their investigation.

Detectives, backed by social workers and Government inspectors, are looking at claims of sexual and physical abuse against children at the home.

And the investigators are digging through files going back 10 years.

The Social Service’s Inspectors were called in after the Sunday Sun revealed at least SEVEN allegations of sexual abuse at children’s homes and centres for the mentally handicapped in Sunderland.

ABUSE

One man from a home for the mentally handicapped quit his job last year after being accused of a sex attack on a female colleague.

He had been questioned TWICE about sex abuse claims against residents — once 12 years ago and again four years ago.

A member of staff at another home was quizzed in 1990 about claims of sex abuse against a 32-year-old mentally-handicapped woman.

Police sent a file to the Crown Prosecution Service but no further action was taken and he returned to work.

It is believed the police and the SSI are not looking further at the allegations of abuse against the mentally handicapped.

But they are following up more than a DOZEN criminal allegations relating to children’s homes.

The full SSI report into the running of children’s homes won’t be published for another few weeks.

But a spokesman for the Government watching body confirmed staff “lacked guidance and control.”

Those arrested so far are being questioned about claims that a woman social worker had sex with a 14-year-old boy in 1987.

There are also accusations that children were assaulted and urged to attack each other.

Three staff were sacked after the claims were made.

ARRESTED

But Sunderland Council admitted that police were NOT informed at the time.

And a 15-year-old boy has been charged with rape and other sexual offences against girls as young as EIGHT ... in the grounds of the home.
Reports of neglect at children’s home

CONTINUING unrest over conditions in Sunderland children’s homes keeps the issue in the public eye.

A report by the Social Services Inspectorate was critical of a number of aspects of child care in the town.

But no mention was made of any specific current problems with regard to child sexual abuse, as had been alleged by sections of the local media.

However the main target of the inspectorate was Witherwack House, which they described as being "dirty, damaged, and lacking in basic amenities, with few home comforts for the children".

A spokesman for the Borough’s Social Services department was anxious to point out that the council had taken immediate action as soon as they received the report two weeks ago.

"In light of the report we have instigated changes to Witherwack House," he said.

"Our Director went to Witherwack accompanied by building experts and inspected the home from top to bottom."

"The report implied the staff would benefit from more intensive training and we are taking steps to remedy that criticism."

He added: "We have already been in touch with the Aycliffe Child Development Unit, and they are drawing up a staff training programme for us."

"Meetings have also been arranged between the staff and the children, to try and get them more involved in the day to day running of the home."

"If we can get them to participate in improving conditions then perhaps this would curb any vandalism in the home."

Much of the criticism of Witherwack House — which was opened 14 years ago at a cost of £1.5m — was aimed at the living conditions.

The report talked of a "dirty and untidy kitchen and bathroom with damaged equipment and some bedrooms smelling of urine."

It stated that the urinal was in a poor state of repair with holes in the roof, cracked glass, broken furniture and tiles.

The findings also said the inspectors were concerned about child protection in the home and the management's ignorance of how much restraint was used.

The council spokesman said: "The definition of restraint can be applied to very minor restrictions, and we are sure there is nothing of a serious nature referred to by the use of that word in the report."

"No conflict of interests"

COUNT Tom Curniskey has announced his resignation as Vice Chairman of the Social Services Committee.

Coun. Curniskey said the fact that his wife is an employee at Witherwack House had never been an impediment to his membership of the committee.

"As there is now a focus of attention on residential child care taking place within the Borough, I feel I can no longer take a prominent role as a Vice Chairman would within this committee. I do not wish to enter the minefield of conflict of interest," his statement said.

"I have been involved in Social Services matters for 10 years and it is my main interest. I am therefore saddened to be standing down, but I feel it is in everyone's interest that I do so. I will however continue to serve on the Social Services Committee."
'Untrue' report dubbed harmful

ALLEGATIONS of a potential sex abuse scandal at Weareside children's homes has been strenuously denied by council officials.

Press allegations of youngsters being raped and sexually abused by older children in at least one of the 12 homes run by the council have been branded as "untrue and harmful".

"There is no inquiry of this nature being undertaken by the authority. We have no knowledge of reports of an organised drug ring at one of the homes, and there is virtually no vandalism of any of the homes," said a spokesman for Social Services.

According to the spokesman the reports in the press of child prostitution, sexual misbehaviour, council and police inquiries had no basis of truth.

The investigation by the Social Services Inspectorate which was carried out last year when they arrived in the town to investigate three homes, Witherwick, Emsworth and Avenue Vivian, was at the invitation of the council.

"Following the Pindown, Orkney, Cleveland and Leicestershire investigations, every county was investigated, and along with other authorities we offered these three homes to be investigated as routine," said the spokesman.

"As far as any investigation is concerned, there is a constant low level police involvement in all such cases."

"The council have a good working relationship with the police, and are constantly in touch with them."

By BOB ALLAN

According to the spokesman, an investigation into child abuse allegations resulted in three dismissals from the authority's homes, one for a sexual offence and the other two for inciting violent acts but an oversight in the reasons for the dismissals not being reported to the police at the time.

Commenting on any links with the departure of Social Services Director, Colin Smart, the spokesman said Mr Smart had retired through great pressure of work and had been working 70 hours a week.

"We desperately want to clear up these allegations. The children in these homes go to normal schools and are under tremendous pressure from all these unfounded allegations."

"These kids have been hurt and we want to stop it."
The report, which is based on an investigation by the Department of Social Services, was released on Thursday. It details the experiences of children who were placed in foster care without proper safeguards and highlights the need for better oversight and regulation in the system.

The investigation found that many children were placed in foster care without proper background checks, and that there were instances of neglect and abuse. The report also noted that the department failed to provide adequate support and resources to foster parents.

BY ANNE TAYLOR

REPEAT RIDDLE

Child Scandal

THE JOURNAL Monday
New rap for abuse homes officials

DEATH threat writer Salman Rushdie said yesterday that political changes in Iran and Britain had improved his chances of emerging from a life in hiding.

"The issue is ever, very much alive and I'm very anxious that it should be resolved while I'm still very much alive," the British author said in a U.S. television interview.

Fergie files in: The Duchess of York arrived in Argentina yesterday for a private visit to her mother. She was accompanied by her financial advisor U.S. lawyer John Bryant.

Star fined: England soccer star Carlton Palmer was fined by magistrates in his absence yesterday for a speeding offence. The 26-year-old midfielder was ordered to pay £54 and picked up three penalty points at Sheffield Magistrates Court after police monitored his J-registered Mercedes doing 45 mph in a 30 mph zone.

Poland's PM: Waldemar Pawlak, a 32-year-old farmer's leader, yesterday became Poland's new Prime Minister after Jan Olceszaki's beleaguered coalition was dismissed by parliament amid a row over alleged secret agents.

Wolf warning: A woman whose pack of 15 dogs includes several offspring of a wolf, is to be forced to reduce their number to four. Legal action is to be taken to make owner Sharon Harrington-Hawes limit the number of dogs she keeps at her home in the village of Carno, Powys.

Rapist hunted: Police launched a manhunt after a woman was beaten and raped in Runcorn, Cheshire, after opening her door to a man posing as a detective.

Spy secrets: The Russian government is to open a large number of secret Communist Party archives, including files revealing party links with terrorists and the use of KGB agents abroad.

HIGH-RANKING officials have been severely criticised in a new report into the management of council-run homes where youngsters were sexually and physically abused.

Leading national expert Emlyn Cassam, who has produced the damning report on the running of children's homes in Sunderland, accuses the officials of failing to react to the crisis.

And he believes the same type of abuse could be happening in other homes nationwide.

Mr Cassam, a retired social services director, is calling for a sweeping review on how Sunderland Council looks after children.

Call for big changes:

His report, which follows an earlier highly-critical report by the Social Services Inspectorate, contains 20 recommendations.

They include closing down at least one home - and possibly a second - as well as introducing major changes.

Sunderland social services is at the centre of a police investigation into sexual and physical abuse of children.

Seven past and present members of staff have been quizzed by police - including a high-ranking social worker - and a file is with the Crown Prosecution Service to determine whether charges will be brought.

One former female worker is alleged to have had sex with a 14-year-old boy in her care in 1987.

Two male colleagues are alleged to have incited youngsters to violence. All three were sacked.

BY PATRICK LAVELLE

Mr Cassam says staff were dismissed for assaults on youngsters and there was sexual abuse by children on other children. Neighbours complained about the youngsters and there was a high level of absconding.

He adds: "Of particular concern is that most of these problems must have been present for many years.

"And yet the city's homes are regularly visited by councillors of all parties, senior managers and homes officers. And the conditions must have been known to field social workers, professional staff from other agencies and departments, visiting parents and the children themselves."

The earlier SSI report said that in one home, Witherwack House, children were subjected to a "repressive" regime "more akin to assault."

One of those children - now a young man - claimed the abuse included kangaroo courts, "power punching", infliction to violence and a "bizarre method of control known as "Running the Gauntlet"."

Mr Cassam says one of the reasons staff may have used those methods of restraint was because there were too many disruptive children for untrained staff to cope with in one large home.

The treatment would have been viewed as acceptable because other staff saw what was happening and colleagues responsible for the assaults were dismissed but reinstated.

His recommendations include: counselling for all children who have suffered abuse and a "radical change" in the way in which some staff view their responsibilities.

Mr Cassam said an inquiry by experts into whether other abuse went undetected should stop, so that they can concentrate on abuse that may be occurring now.
Expert team puts the spotlight on Wearside children's homes

THE GOOD

Home is home from home

A LIST of changes has been given to Sunderland Social services after the detailed inspection of three children's homes.

It was carried out in November last year, and as well as looking at the homes, the team, led by acting chief social services inspector J.K. Corcoran, interviewed staff, residents and former residents.

Their draft report sounds warning bells over the care of children in Withers House, while recognising the other two homes, Wellsworth by Blyth and Avenue View in Fence Houses, showed good staff/child relationships.

Withers House demonstrated "a permissive regime with an inappropriate and high level of use of physical restraint and a failure to protect children," said the report.

Staff management, supervision, training and monitoring of what was offered to children was "too low,," with too few staff trained, and child protection was not looked after.

The inspectors have drawn up a list of improvements of the running of the homes and asked Sunderland Council to act on them.

Included were:
- No staff/child relationships
- Lack of knowledge of child protection procedures
- Failure to use records correctly and breach of Children Act in record keeping
- Hard-working and committed staff given little opportunities to improve practice

The inspectors expressed particular concern over child protection, warning that many children were already suffering abuse in one form or another.

Top-level probe demands major improvements

- Low level of children's involvement in decisions about their home and their future
- Lack of knowledge by staff of child protection procedures
- Lack of training to assess and develop self-esteem and self-confidence
- Inadequate training, support, monitoring and management

They commented, "It is concerning to note that the level of training, information support and management varied in these matters so low in Sunderland.

"There is a need for a safe and happy child in a residential situation. The climate is currently such that children and staff are not clear as to where, when or how to complain and are unaware of who to report to and who to challenge.

"It is important that managers of the service immediately carry out the recommendations in the report to ensure that all children are given the best care possible."

The inspectors recommended that the visits should be repeated and that the visits should be repeated and the visits should be repeated.

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Good, bad, and ugly face of child care

The good, the bad, and the ugly faces of child care in Sunderland are highlighted in a Government report.

- Children in care are not properly protected in Sunderland, according to Department of Health inspectors.
- They are not given the same rights as other children, except for education.
- Inspectors have already visited the homes where the Department of Health’s Social Services Inspectorate (SIS) has concerns.
- They have visited a number of homes to see if children are safe and being properly cared for.
- The report follows a series of incidents in other parts of the country.

A draft report presented to Sunderland Council has yet to be agreed by council social services officials before publication.

But it includes an indictment of one home for its "repressive regime" and high level of physical restraint. The council also faces criticism for its staff training, management, and living conditions.

Turn to page 4 for Municipal Editor Barbara McTennan’s exclusive insight into Sunderland child care.

MURDER POLICE IN DAWN RAIN
COUNCIL UNDER FIRE AS FOUR ARE BAILED IN LATEST HOMES SCANDAL

Care staff arrested in child abuse probe

BY ALISON GORDON

FOUR former social workers have been arrested in connection with an investigation into physical and sexual abuse at children's homes.

The move comes as a Government report on the running of the Sunderland council homes is set to be published next week.

A leaked draft of the report condemned the council for implementing a 'repressive regime'; failing to give adequate management guidance and control; and providing general child care below an acceptable standard over the last decade.

The Social Services Inspectorate launched an inquiry after Government calls for tighter checks in the wake of abuse scandals in Leicester and Staffordshire. Three of the suspects, now on police bail, were dismissed from Withernwick House in 1987 following allegations of physical and sexual abuse.

Sunderland social services admit they failed to inform the police of the allegations at the time.

The fourth suspect was working at the home until arrested last week. The two other homes investigated by the SSI were Avenue Vivian, in Peacehouses, and Wellesley Nautical School in Blyth.

An SSI spokesman said last night: 'The report has raised concerns about three children's homes relating to child sexual and physical abuse. It is being considered by the local authority and we are in close contact with them about how they can best implement the report's recommendations.'

The police investigation was launched after social services director Colin Smart and the SSI expressed their concern.

Mr Smart, 53, is taking early retirement at the end of the month after under a year in the job. His decision is believed to be connected to his frustrated efforts to improve running of the homes. At the time of his retirement announcement he said he could no longer cope with the demands of the job. He was unable to comment last night.

In response to recommendations outlined by the SSI, Sunderland has called in an independent adviser to review residential child care services.

A spokesman for the council said last night: 'The SSI has identified problems that we need to address and that is what we are doing.'

Social workers involved in a Leicester child abuse scandal are to be re-investigated by their bosses.

County council officials will follow up a police inquiry which led to Frank Beck being jailed last year for abusing youngsters and colleagues at three homes in his charge.

Detectives have been asked for evidence of practices that, while not being unlawful, might constitute a disciplinary offence.

Union officials say the move is 'stifling' and may make staff reluctant to give full evidence to a Government inquiry begun last month.

Of 120 council staff interviewed by police in the Beck inquiry, 80 have left their jobs.

Pioneer unit is threatened with closure

A PIONEER child abuse investigation unit is threatened with closure.

The scheme, launched last July, has been hailed as a breakthrough in child protection. It has dealt with 300 cases without removing one child into care. The response rate is quicker and more efficient.

A closed session of the council will discuss the closure on Tuesday. It comes despite Government recommendations of closer cooperation between the two professions. A senior social worker, named because of a council ban on speaking to the Press, said last night: 'We feel this is a political measure. There are no professional reasons for closing us down.'

Inspector Stuart Collier, the unit's police leader, says: 'It would be a big step backwards if this unit were closed. Because we work side by side we can access a risk more closely and quickly.'

Disaster as campaign faces ban

THE Advertising Standards Authority is set to ban a Government advertisement in England for the first time.

The ad, in trouble once before, warns that wasting energy leads to global warming which leads to natural disasters. The disasters shown in the original advert included a wrecked train, a devastated caravan site and trees felled by recent storms.

But people complained that there is insufficient evidence for the claims by the Environment and Energy Departments.

Now the secretary of the ASA is recommending its council bans the £1 million campaign.

When the advert first appeared in the autumn, the widow of a train driver objected to the picture of the crashed train her husband had died in. It had to be replaced with a shot of crashed cars.

A Department spokesman said: 'We're now looking at other concepts to get the message across.'

Employment Secretary Michael Howard has complained to the ASA about a newspaper advertisement by the town hall union NASUWT attacking the Government's 'half-baked' job training schemes.
Ex-boss to solve crisis at city kids homes

COUNCIL chiefs have called in an outside social services expert following fresh allegations of child abuse.

Sunderland City Council are to bring in the retired chief of Norfolk Social Services to sort out the running of their children's homes.

Elaine Coram, from Norwich, will be on the scene in the next fortnight.

He will examine the child care management structure, training and recruitment of staff.

It's the next step in a major probe involving a team of child protection officers, government inspectors and detectives.

Abuse

Police have already arrested four people as they dig through files going back 10 years.

Sunderland CID are looking at more than 100 unopened claims including:

- Allegations a woman carer had sex with a 15-year-old boy.
- Allegations of physical abuse by male staff.
- Allegations centre on one of a dozen homes run by Sunderland Council.

But it was revealed yesterday three staff from another home were also questioned by bosses after allegations by girls in care.

Strict

One 15-year-old claimed he had sex with a care worker last year.

He was suspended and questioned by detectives but no action was taken.

A year earlier, a fellow resident at the social worker was sacked after a relationship with a girl.

She was an adult at the time but staff were concerned about how long he had gone on.

A social services spokesman said: 'We are very strict about these things.'

But police were not told.

And another social worker at the home walked into girls' rooms without knocking.

He 'had his knuckles bent but was not dismissed.'

Meanwhile, a social services inspectorate report is expected in the next week.

SUNDAY

Before pool chalk was invented, shot players would romp their cues into plaster ceilings and walls!

Baffled by barmy letter

No wonder nurse Pat Bates was gobsmacked after talking to her insurance company.

For all she got was GOBLEDE-GOOK!

Pat asked for my help after they turned down a £500 claim. But I got a NONSENSE response from Consolidated Marine.

Complete with misspellings, they wrote:

"WE WOULD LIKE TO POINT OUT THAT WE THE CUSTOMER STANDS IN NO INJURY BUT WE HAVE NOW HAD ALL THAT REQUIRED INFORMATION RECEIVED IN THE OFFICE AND WE HAVE INFORMED OUR BUSINESS PARTNER." A spokesman said: "IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO LET THE CUSTOMER KNOW WHETHER THEY WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THE MATTER FURTHER." 

WHERE is my Employment Training scheme bonus — says John Porter of Chester-le-Street, Co Durham.

Administrators for the scheme run by North East Durham Health Authority sent a cheque within days.

But the heat on plumbers to get a Dispute over boiler sorted out — Heidi Susanne Gentle, of Wetherby, West Yorkshire.

Cased Plumbing and Heating said a charge for £123 had been paid but they did not have Susanne's address until I paid it on.

I HAD to cancel my holiday because my husband died but the refund was in HIS name — complaints Ivy Nurse, of Doncaster, South Yorkshire.

Claims office apologised and issued a new refund in Ivy's name after the bank refused to handle the original cheque.

RIVER David French did a U-turn after a dispute involving his brand-new car was sorted out.

At first, the furious motorist blew a gasket and told me all about his problems.

But he CALMED DOWN after it had been resolved — to his full satisfaction.

David, of St Leonard Street, Sunderland, told me he wasn't happy with the paintwork on his motor.

The dispute was with makers Peugeot and dealers Richard Hardie, said David.

BATTLE

After it was settled, David said: 'All I can say is that an amicable and private settlement has been reached between myself and Richard Hardie.'

But a friend told me the garage chain had bought the 205 model back for more than £1000.

And the friend said that Peugeot had agreed to settle with me only that he was happy with the outcome.

I am DELIGHTED for David — and don't blame him for keeping mum.

After all, the dispute ended in success for him.

When David first came to me, I put his problem to garage manager Richard Hardie.

He confirmed there had been issues.
New child care scandal shakes social services

BY CATRIONA MARCHANT

A major investigation has been launched by police and the SSI into allegations of physical and sexual abuse of young people in Sunderland children's homes over ten years.

Sunderland police's child protection unit has arrested four former care workers at Witherwack House in the city, and the SSI is investigating all the authority's 12 children's homes.

Community Care understands that the SSI was called in last April by the newly-appointed social services director Colin Smart following concerns about protection of children at homes. It is now understood that Smart's sudden retirement from his post earlier this month was directly linked to these concerns.

The Sunderland investigations follow the recent scandal of abuse by Frank Beck in Worcestershire children's homes, and will intensify fears that Beck's is not an isolated case.

In Sunderland, a leaked draft report from the SSI on three homes is understood to refer to a 'repressive regime' at Witherwack, and to lack of management guidance and control.

Three of the four arrested former workers were dismissed in 1991 because one of them, a woman, was accused of having sex with a 14-year-old boy, and two were accused of physically abusing children.

The fourth was working at Witherwack until his arrest last week.

The SSI admitted this week that police were not informed at the time of the alleged incidents in 1991. The police investigation was launched at the end of last year in response to concerns about the safety of children.

The three men and one woman arrested are on police bail, facing further questioning. Following a separate incident last year at Witherwack, a 15-year-old boy has been charged with rape against young children at the home and is awaiting trial.

Sunderland has called in Norfolk's former director of social services, Emlyn Cassam, as an independent adviser to look at residential child care services in the city and in particular the management structure of children's homes.

Row Parker, now director of Sunderland SSD, said it was carrying out recommendations contained in the draft SSI report and lessons learned were being applied to all 12 homes.

The authority is currently working with the SSI to review staff training, use of restraint on young people, complaints procedures for children and care leavers and furnishing in the homes.

"We have serious problems to address and we are simply getting on with that task," said Parker.

Care plans at risk over government cash delay

Local authority care plans for elderly people could be placed in jeopardy next year if the government further delays a decision on how much social security is to be transferred to each SSD in April 1993.

From this date, income support for elderly people needing residential care is to be paid by local authorities under the Community Care Act. Authorities were told by the DoH last year that the funding details would be made available by the end of 1991.

But it has now emerged that full details of what each authority will receive from the DSS are unlikely to be announced before November - almost a year later.

Social services directors, some of whom were told of the delay by DoH officials, are warning that they will be unable to plan and budget for the care needs of elderly people.

"In June this year my members will expect me to make hard spending proposals for 1993-4," said Chris Gostick, director of Westminster SSD.

"Without knowledge of DSS cash, we won't be able to plan care for elderly people moving from acute hospital beds into nursing care."

Even if the DSS is able to announce national funds to be transferred in July, this will not indicate a geographical breakdown for each authority.

Authorities fear that the total funds may fall short of the needs of elderly people because of the current gap between income support levels and the costs of residential care.

The Association of Metropolitan Authorities estimates the gap will rise above £900 million in 1993-4.

The Torx chairman of the Commons health committee, Nicholas Winterton MP, told BASW's London members last week that unless the shortfall is made up, 'chaos, confusion and mayhem' would ensue.

• See Comment, page 11.

NHS backs down on joint training

The NHS appeared to swallow its misgivings about joint qualifications for all unqualified care staff at an emergency meeting of the Care Sector Consortium this week.

NHS representatives said an internal consultation had revealed overwhelming support for integrated national vocational qualifications, with 80 per cent of its managers and trainers favouring the proposals.

The NHS was quite enthusiastic about the concept of going forward on integrated awards: a different response from what might have been expected," said Care Sector Consortium chairman Gareth Gambles.

Until now the NHS has been lukewarm about integrated awards, partly because some of its top management feared losing staff to better-paid local authority jobs. But it is believed to have bowed to pressure from the government, which has strongly backed integrated awards for the 300,000 care staff in the health and social services sectors.
ARREST NO 4 IN PROBE AT KIDS' HOME

Detectives probing a child abuse scandal in the North have arrested a FOURTH suspect.

The man, a residential social worker, was also SUSPENDED from his job at a children's home in Sunderland.

Police swooped on Friday after having already arrested two men and a woman who used to work at the home.

A fifth person, also employed as a residential social worker, was questioned before being allowed to return to his job.

The four suspects have not been charged and are on police bail as child protection officers continue their investigation.

Detectives, backed by social workers and Government inspectors, are looking at claims of sexual and physical abuse against children at the home.

And the investigators are digging through files going back 10 years.

The Social Service's Inspectorate were called in after the Sunday Sun revealed at least SEVEN allegations of sexual abuse at children's homes and centres for the mentally handicapped in Sunderland.

ABUSE

One man from a home for the mentally handicapped quit his job last year after being accused of a sex attack on a female colleague.

He had been questioned TWICE about sex abuse claims against residents — once 12 years ago and again four years ago.

A member of staff at another home was quizzed in 1990 about claims of sex abuse against a 32-year-old mentally-handicapped woman.

Police sent a file to the Crown Prosecution Service but no further action was taken and he returned to work.

It is believed the police and the SSI are not looking further at the allegations of abuse against the mentally handicapped.

But they are following up more than a DOZEN criminal allegations relating to children's homes.

The full SSI report into the running of children's homes won't be published for another few weeks.

But a spokesman for the Government watchdog body confirmed staff "lacked guidance and control."

Those arrested so far are being questioned about claims that a woman social worker had sex with a 14-year-old boy in 1987.

There are also accusations that children were assaulted and urged to attack each other.

Three staff were sacked after the claims were made.

ARRESTED

But Sunderland Council admitted that police were NOT informed at the time.

And a 15-year-old boy has been charged with rape and other sexual offences against girls as young as EIGHT...in the grounds of the home.

Detective Chief Inspector Dave Wilson, who heads Sunderland CID's child protection squad, declined to discuss the inquiry in detail.

But he told the Sunday Sun: "I can confirm a fourth person has been arrested and is currently on police bail."

"A fifth person was interviewed but released without charge."

The developments were confirmed by Sunderland Council who said the case...
CARE HOME PROBE

EXTRA START

Specialists called in
to solve problems

Sunderland Times today

By Barbra McAlenran, Journal and Echo

Fun and games for all the family — Page 32

Extra start
'Untrue' report dubbed harmful

ALLEGATIONS of a potential sex abuse scandal at Wearsides children’s homes has been strenuously denied by council officials.

Press allegations of youngsters being raped and sexually abused by older children in at least one of the 12 homes run by the council have been branded as "untrue and harmful".

"There is no inquiry of this nature being undertaken by the council. We have no knowledge of reports of an organised drug ring at one of the homes, and there is virtually no vandalism of any of the homes," said a spokesman for Social Services.

According to the spokesman the reports in the press of child prostitution, sexual misbehaviour, council and police inquiries had no basis of truth.

The investigation by the Social Services Inspectorate which was carried out last year when they arrived in the town to investigate three homes, Witherwack, Wickersley and Avenue Vivian, was at the invitation of the council.

"Following the Pindown, Orkney, Cleveland and Leicestershire investigations, every county was investigated, and along with other authorities we offered these three homes to be investigated as routine," said the spokesman.

As far as any police investigation is concerned, there is a constant low level police involvement in all such cases.

"The council have a good working relationship with the police, and are constantly told of any incidents," the spokesman added.

By BOB ALLAN

According to the spokesman, an investigation in 1987 into sexual allegations resulted in three dismissals from the authority's homes, one for a sexual offence and the other two for inciting violent acts but an "oversight" resulted in the reasons for the dismissals not being reported to the police at the time.

Commenting on any links with the departure of Social Services Director, Colin Smart, the spokesman said Mr Smart had retired through great pressure of work, and had been working 70 hours a week.

"We desperately want to clear up these allegations. The children in these homes go to normal schools and are under tremendous pressure from all these unfounded allegations.

"These kids have been
Child scandal report riddle

Reports of an alleged child sex abuse scandal in Sunderland have been played down by sources close to the borough's social services department.

Press reports alleged yesterday that a secret investigation was underway into the running of 12 children's homes in the Sunderland area where 200 youngsters are in care.

Police, child protection experts and Government inspectors were said to have launched a major inquiry into the homes after a Social Services Inspectorate report was said to have claimed staff at the council-run homes lacked guidance and control, that young people were allowed to have sex with each other and that there was a general lack of discipline.

But last night a highly-placed borough council source said a report by the Social Services Inspectorate was merely routine and nothing to cause concern.

By ANNE TAYLOR

He slammed Press reports naming homes at the centre of the inspection for leaving the youngsters open to the taunts of classmates.

And Acting Det Supt Dave Wilson, who heads Sunderland CID's child protection squad, said: "As a matter of policy I don't discuss such cases."

The social services source, who did not wish to be named, said that there was a draft report into three children's homes which was being checked for accuracy. "Investigations into the running of care homes are regular and usually contain constructive criticism," he said.

"The current report is being checked and will then be officially presented to the council and, until then, we can't comment. "But reports have linked this inspection with other incidents from the past which are entirely unconnected."

The source also confirmed that there was a separate police inquiry into allegations of sex between youngsters living in one of the homes, but this was not connected to the investigation by the SSI.

And he criticised the report in the Sunday Sun, which named the three children's homes at the centre of the inspection.

"Most of the children in these homes go to ordinary schools and will now face the taunts of their classmates after their homes were named," he said.

"We are supposed to be in the business of protecting and caring for children, not exposing them."

A spokesman for Sunderland Borough Council said that the SSI report was a draft version and subject to factuality checking by the department's officers in accordance with usual practice.

Compensation for Gulf RR offer
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