

Operation Middleton – Interim Report

Report by: Director of Policy

Consulted formally: EDSSHI, Borough Solicitor

Authorized for circulation by: Chris Lee, Director of Policy

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PURPOSE

To report to Members on the first full year of operation of the Middleton investigation.

RECOMMENDATION

That the report be noted.

For decision

1. Context

- 1.1 Operation Middleton was established in November 1998. It is a joint Metropolitan Police and Lambeth Council investigation into allegations of abuse of children in the care of Lambeth in residential homes under the control of Lambeth Social Services Department, or with other carers, between 1974 and 1994.
- 1.2 During the period under investigation Lambeth operated and used 35 Childrens homes and 7003 children looked after were placed in care. The last Lambeth run children's home was closed in 1995. Whilst the investigation has concentrated on its original terms of reference it has inevitably and properly been drawn beyond them through the need to ensure that the interests of children are at the centre of its work.
- 1.3 Due to the nature of the investigation Members and the public will understand that it is not possible to report in detail on the operation without prejudicing its success. This report aims to provide an interim analysis of the work undertaken and planned over the next 12 months.

2. Justification

2.1 Method of operation

- 2.1.1 The Lambeth Council element of the Middleton operation known as CHILE – CHildren In Lambeth Enquiry] was established in November 1998. Whilst the Team is employed by Lambeth Council, apart from one seconded member of Lambeth's staff it consists of agency staff and consultants who are independent of the Council. The Team is headed by a Consultant child care worker who is an acknowledged expert in the field and advisor to many Local authorities and Police forces. The Team consists of 16 carefully selected staff with a range of skills appropriate to the task in hand.
- 2.1.2 The Team is not based within Social Services and acts independently of Council Departments. It was established to report and continues to report to the Chief Executive and the Director of Policy. The Team also reports to a Strategy Group which includes Senior Police Officers and a representative from the Social Services Inspectorate. Whilst the telephone number publicised for the public to call on is a Council number this is because the team has been provided with secure accommodation within the Town Hall.
- 2.1.3 The Police element of the operation consists of a similar sized team. The operation is a true joint operation with joint working between Police and Child care staff facilitated on a daily basis in order to secure the most robust investigation. The operation also works closely with the Department of Health Social Services Inspectorate and ensures that relevant information is shared with other child care organisations and Local authorities to protect the safety of children.

2.2 Building strong foundations

2.2.1 The key initial task once the operation was established was to develop reliable intelligence and information systems that would underpin the operation in the medium to long term. To this end the operation has established a comprehensive database of children looked after, staff and residential establishments for children used by Lambeth. This included:

- 35 Childrens homes
- 1,400 staff
- 14,500 children [for the period 1974-1994 7,003 children looked after were cared for]

2.2.2 Another of the key tasks was to establish reliable comprehensive archives of data including children's files some of which can run to several bundles. A great deal of effort has been put into securing archives which not only assist this operation but will be of lasting benefit for the borough. A specialist archivist has worked on the team from the early days to complete this task.

2.2.3 Protocols have been developed and agreed for the retention of information and its archiving so that information can in future be rapidly identified and found. It is intended that on conclusion of Operation Middleton that the Children First Audit Team maintains the database and provides an independent resource for children. It is interesting to note that we were able to commence searching for names following the publication of the Waterhouse enquiry within 6 minutes of the request from the Dept of Health.

2.2.4 Terms of reference for the Children First Audit Team are presently being drafted by staff in Legal Services and Social Services and if available these will be circulated at the Policy Committee meeting.

2.3 Successes – key outputs:

The operation has been successful in a number of areas and the following key outputs have been achieved;

- Over 200 alleged victims have come forward and provided information to the operation
- 7 persons have been arrested
- A number of persons remain under investigation
- Assisting in the preparations for the trial and successful imprisonment of an ex member of staff in July 1999
- Assistance in investigating issues leading to disciplinary action against a number of staff in Social Services
- Counselling offered to all alleged victims and provided to 12 ;
- Establishment of database and archives;
- Provision of training and policy development advice to Social Services Dept[s] and the Police;
- Making existing systems safer;
- Ensuring that as far as possible there are no persons within the system who could abuse children

Protocols

In order to establish an environment of trust and credibility, protocols were agreed between the different parties

- Police and social workers within Operation Middleton.
- Operation Middleton and local child protection teams.
- The health authority.
- Youth Justice and Young Adult Services.
- Children & Families.

The protocols set the parameters for referrals, retrieval of files, responding to the needs of victims and for current staff to have access to Operation Middleton in a confidential setting should they wish to make a complaint, the interests of the child always being paramount.

2.4 Social Services staff

2.4.1 Throughout the period in which this operation has been conducted a number of staff in Social Services have been suspended and some disciplined and dismissed. At present there are 7 staff suspended whilst management investigations are carried out into child protection or other matters brought to light by or during the life of Operation Middleton. Only one of the 9 suspended or dismissed is in connection with an allegation that they directly abused a child. In addition 2 staff have been dismissed [both pending appeal] The race and gender profile is as follows :

Dismissed staff [2]	1x White female , 1X Black Afro Caribbean female
Suspended staff [7]	5 x White males 2 x Black Afro Caribbean female

It is important to record that Social Services staff have assisted the operation. Suspension of staff is no indication of guilt and it should also be noted that there are a number of other staff in Social Services who are suspended whilst investigations are carried out into matters completely unrelated to this area of work such as allegations of financial impropriety or general misconduct.

Case Study

Mrs. X made a self referral following a newspaper article. Mrs. X requested information re suing Lambeth Council for failing to protect her during her childhood in care.

The initial telephone call took one hour and forty minutes and resulted in:-

- Information required to trace her care history.
- Agreement to a visit from a member of the team to take an initial statement.

The data bases were interrogated and provided:-

- Care history for Mrs. X and her siblings.
- Time line for all staff and children placed in the same children's home.
- The children's files were requested from archives and delivered the same day.

The above process took ten minutes. The team member liaised with a police colleague from Middleton and an action plan agreed:-

- CHILE to complete research.
- Strategy/planning meeting to take place in two days' time.
- Visit to Mrs. X would be joint.

The research revealed links with a suspect already under investigation. The alleged offender was traced and is not currently working with children. The offender's employment data and file were previously researched by CHILE.

There were three joint interviews in order for Mrs X to give a detailed statement.

The police action resulted in the alleged offender being arrested, interviewed and bailed for one month whilst papers are prepared and further information gathered to progress the criminal court process. The social work action consists of:-

- risk assessment in terms of health screening, counselling, witness support, housing advice, financial advice, referral to social work department, psychiatrist, psychologist and voluntary agencies.
- Joint interview of siblings and risk assessment.
- Research all contacts with alleged offender, risk assess, trace and interview.
- Notify insurance of potential claim

CHILE to write:-

- Incident Report.
- Report for Mrs. X's file and any other young person involved in the above process to alert anyone in the future who examines the file that there is a confidential file as part of the Middleton Investigation and to summarise the action taken.

CHILE to hold a closure meeting to evaluate the process and outcomes.

Mrs. X to be kept informed at all stages and to have access to the team throughout the process.

2.5 Future work –

The operation has moved into an intelligence led proactive phase building on the strong foundations and information systems established. Key work over the next 12 months includes:

- Complete the individual action plans for the alleged victims located in year one
- Continue to research the further alleged victims highlighted by Middleton. These are mostly young people who have not made complaints but with whom suspects may have had contact.
- Follow up the John Barratt report with an investigation into the individuals linked with known perpetrators.
- Investigate issues arising from the Waterhouse Report – already a part of the CHILE investigation.
- Trace all staff previously involved in complaints/disciplinary enquiries and assess references given, current employment and risk to children. Liaise with local authorities as necessary.

- Complete the history of residential care in Lambeth.
- Develop protocols for the future management of the databases once Operation Middleton is completed.
- Write good practice guidelines following lessons learned from the enquiry.
- Complete the actions required following the press reporting of CHILE telephone number which resulted in over 60 calls.
- Continue liaison with other relevant Police and local authorities together with child care providers across the country

2.5 The Waterhouse Report

2.5.1 In February 2000 Sir Ronald Waterhouse published his report “ Lost In Care “ detailing child abuse in children’s homes in the North Wales during the 70’s and 80’s. The report made 72 recommendations many of which are relevant to Lambeth and some of which are only relevant to Welsh authorities. Appendix 1 to this report summarises how the authority is or has responded to the recommendations. [**this Appendix will be circulated at or shortly before Committee**]

3. Legal Powers and Advice

3.1 There are no specific legal implications

4. Financial Considerations

4.1 In 1999/00 Lambeth’s work on the Middleton inquiry was budgeted at £500,000, however this budget also included work on the Barratt investigation. The spend was incurred by Social Services but was a call on balances. Due to additional costs including unanticipated work on disciplinary investigations and an extension of the brief for the Barratt inquiry the cost in 1999/2000 is expected to be in the order of £750,000. In 2000/01 the budget for Lambeth Council’s work on Operation Middleton has been set at £500,000.

5. Equal Opportunities Considerations

5.1 To be added

6 Health Considerations

6.1 To be added

7 Environmental Considerations

7.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising out of this report

Background documents

Audit trail

Committee Deadline (first in cycle):		13.3.00		
Author:		Chris Lee		
Date Drafted:		13.3.00		
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS/DIRECTORATES				
DIRECTORATE	DATE SENT	DATE RECEIVED	DATE CLEARED	DATE RECEIVED
Borough Solicitor	13.3.00	13.3.00	14.3.00	14.3.00
Met Police	13.3.00	13.3.00	14.3.00	14.3.00
Date sent to Committee Secretariat:		15.3.00		
Date received by Committee Secretariat:		15.3.00		
Date sent to Councillors:		16.3.00		

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Schedule of recommendations from Waterhouse report and how Lambeth is addressing them

TO FOLLOW