

OPERATION MIDDLETON – 3RD INTERIM REPORT

Report by: Director of Policy & Performance - Chief Executives
Department

Consultation (internal) - Borough Solicitor, EDSSHI, Chief Executive,
Cllr Judith Brodie, ex Executive Member.
Cllr Roland Doven , Executive Member
Consultation (external) - Met Police, SSI

Authorised for submission by Chris Lee, Director of Policy &
Performance

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PURPOSE

To update members on the work of Operation Middleton.

RECOMMENDATION

That the report be noted.

1. Relevant Corporate Themes

The work of Operation Middleton covers the following strategic themes:

- Good homes, strong communities, low crime
- A healthy supportive society

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Operation continues to function as a successful partnership between the Council and the Met Police. Effective groundwork has established a strong position in order to ensure that past perpetrators of child abuse are brought to justice as effectively as possible. There have been court cases and convictions as a result of the operation and more are expected. The work of the Operation is changing and will not need to be budgeted at the same level in the next financial year.

3 Context

- 3.1 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 when they were finally closed in 1995.

- 3.2 During the period under investigation Lambeth operated and used 35 Children's homes and 7003 children looked after were placed in care. The last of 35 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 in the interests of ensuring that the continuing safety of children is at the centre of its work.
- 3.3 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 since the last annual report and that planned over the next few months.
- 3.4 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 carefully selected staff with a range of skills appropriate to the task in hand.
- 3.5 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 & Performance. The Team also reports to a Strategy Group which includes Senior Police Officers and a representative from the Social Services Inspectorate. Regular updates are also provided to the monthly tripartite briefings for lead social services members from all parties. The Team is provided with secure accommodation within the Town Hall and advertises a non-Council switchboard telephone number.
- 3.6 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 childcare organisations and Local authorities to protect the safety of children.

The first Interim report to Policy Committee on 5.4.2000 recorded the following key actions of the operation:

- Establishment of a comprehensive database of children , homes and carers / staff;
- Establishment of protocols with key agencies for the collection / retention of information;

- Assisting in the preparations for the trial and imprisonment of an ex employee in July 1999.

In addition the CHILE team provided support in:

- Management investigations leading to disciplinary action against Social Services staff;
- Provision of training and policy development advice to Social Services

4. Report

4.1 Since the last Interim report the operation has been working to a detailed action plan and the following significant actions can be reported on :

- The team continues to provide support to Operation Middleton in relation to research, witness support, joint interviews and production of chronologies.
- There has been regular and on going liaison with the Council's insurers in relation to victims. CHILE has worked closely with the Legal Department, preparing detailed chronologies as requested and assisting in the preparation of documentation for hearings of Public Immunity Interest.
- Links have been forged with Health Authorities, National Police Investigations where Lambeth children have been placed in establishments outside the Borough and contact with other local authorities. Contact continues on a regular basis.
- The creation of an efficient Lambeth archives system including a data base which in December 2001 was formally transferred to the Social Services Archives Manager.
- At the request of Social Services CHILE reviewed the Lambeth Child Protection Policy and made relevant recommendations
- Conducted research and a Child Protection Risk Assessment and child protection investigations at the request of Lambeth Social Services.
- At the request of Social Services CHILE investigated allegations made against Lambeth Social Services by an adoptive parent and submitted a report for the attention of the Ombudsman (Case of O).
- Research and response in relation to the Independent enquiry known as "The Clough Report"
- Research and compilation of a document: History of Lambeth Social Services Children's services to be included in the CHILE final report at the conclusion of the enquiry

- The completion of a project to catalogue 6000 client files from Cumberlow Lodge and prepare for return to originating authorities. This included conducting research on a sample of 600 files.
- Provision of witness support prior to and during the trial of William Hook . This included facilitating attendance at the hearing for a number of victims and providing follow up support post trial. The judge in this trial praised the teamwork which led to this conviction.
- Joint working with Police Operation “React” in relation to a number of residential homes in the Bristol area where Lambeth had placed children.
- Joint work with NSPCC including strategy meetings, research, production of chronologies, tracing ex residents and conducting interviews with Lambeth children.

Provision of information

Since April 2001 the team has responded to 274 requests for information from Operation Middleton. Requests have ranged from queries regarding employment or placement history to complex research in relation to diaries and log books.

Victim Support

There are currently 18 victims receiving regular support from the team. This ranges from telephone contact to visits, some outside the London area. Support has included liaison with Health Authorities, Housing Departments, voluntary agencies and counselling organisations.

4.2 Future Work - the operation is very much an intelligence led one building on the strong information and systems established in its early months. Detailed Risk assessment and management work has been undertaken with the Met Police to identify the strategic focus for the operation over the short to medium term and the operation is now concentrating on the agreed priorities. This has had to take account of the passage of time, Human Rights legislation, the likelihood of success of criminal prosecutions, the effect on victims / witnesses of progressing or not, and the public interest.

4.3 Priorities for the work for first half of 2002 are:

- Concluding investigation into 4 identified suspected perpetrators of sexual abuse and deciding on appropriate further action;
- Progressing investigations and enquiries into other potential suspects and deciding on any further appropriate action ;
- Investigating a number of 3rd party allegations of abuse [ie where a person has alleged that they are aware of some other person [sometimes unidentified]having been abused sexually by person or persons unidentified]

- Progressing enquiries into 2 specific Lambeth children's homes - Highland Rd and Angell Rd - where abuse by individuals has been identified to identify whether there is any evidence of that abuse being more widespread
- Continuing support to other investigations of a similar nature across the country looking at children's homes where children in Lambeth's care were placed.
- Further victim support and adequate support to any newly identified victims as necessary
- The continuing provision of support from the CHILE team to Operation Middleton, the Council's insurers and the Legal Department.
- The production of individual profiles for each Children's home highlighting significant events/issues and key staff members

4.4 Some of this work may lead to criminal prosecutions whilst other work will lead to the case being closed due to lack of evidence. In particular work on 3rd party allegations and unidentified suspected perpetrators proves the most difficult areas of work from which to deliver satisfactory outcomes in terms of criminal prosecutions .

4.5 The investigation is now over 3 years old and there are areas of work that no longer need to be carried out. These include – database establishment , record and archive management , training and management investigations. This has meant that the budget required in 2002/3 to ensure that the core business of the operation continues is lower than that required in 2001/2.

4.6 The Operation has begun to consider the development of its exit strategy since it is clear that in so doing it will need to ensure provisions are made to guarantee that records, resources and expertise can be available to deal with any future allegations or the need to deal with complex investigations of a similar nature. The work of CHILE and Operation Middleton have laid a very strong foundation for such work to be done in the future. In particular the database of children , children's homes and staff working in those homes is an invaluable resource to any such work . The Operation will over the coming months consider all aspects of current work and the appropriate location for that work ,so that when an exit strategy is developed and that future work can be fully supported

5. Financial implications -

5.1 In the last financial year a total budget of £0.475 million was allocated to the CHILE project. For the next financial year it is considered that this budget can be reduced to no more than £0.35 million a saving of £0.125 million. The figure will be kept under constant review in order to ensure best value is achieved and it is hoped that if an exit strategy is worked towards that further savings can be made against this figure. This budget reflects the changing nature of the work and the fact that the database , records , archives and basic foundations are all in place.

- 5.2 Budgets for the current financial year have been discussed with the Met Police and the proposed budget will fund the team required to support the work that they intend to carry out.

Audit Trail

Executive /Committee Deadline (first in cycle):			16.01.02
Author:			Chris Lee
Date Drafted:			12 /01
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS/DIRECTORATES			
NAME	DIRECTORATE	DATE SENT/ RECEIVED	DATE CLEARED/ RECEIVED
L Christensen	SSHI	Jan 02	Jan 02
Mike Dickens	Legal Services	Jan 02	Jan 02
Date sent to/received by Democratic Services:			16.01.02
Date sent to Councillors:			18.01.02

8. List of Background Documents – None