

OPERATION MIDDLETON – SECOND INTERIM REPORT

Report by: Director of Policy, Chief Executives Department

Consultation (internal) - Borough Solicitor, EDSSHI, Chief Executive

Consultation (external) - Met Police, SSI

Executive Member for Children & Health

Deemed clearance:

Authorised for submission by Chris Lee, Director of Policy

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PURPOSE

To update members on the work of Operation Middleton.

RECOMMENDATION

That the report is 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**

The Operation continues to function as a successful partnership between the Council and the Met Police. Whilst there have been few significant public outputs from the operation effective groundwork has established a strong position in order to ensure that any perpetrators of child abuse are brought to justice as effectively as possible. The Operation needs to be budgeted at the same level in the next financial year.

3. **Context**

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.

During the period under investigation Lambeth operated and used 35 Childrens 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 interests of children are at the centre of its work.

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 report and that planned over the next 12 months

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.

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. The Team is provided with secure accommodation within the Town Hall and advertises a non-Council switchboard telephone number.

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.

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

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

4.1 Criminal investigation

It was anticipated that the trial in Liverpool of John Carroll would be completed by the middle of 2000, freeing Middleton to fully investigate any possible crimes committed in Lambeth. In the event this did not happen until the autumn at which time the

strategy group commissioned a risk analysis to determine the urgency of the investigations already commenced. The risk analysis highlighted thirty-one suspects and sixty-eight witnesses. The complaints range from cruelty through physical abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. The decision of the strategy group was to complete the process of investigation and support for this group and to focus the investigation around one particular Children's home [now closed] – Angell Road, in the early part of 2001. This did not affect the intelligence gathering that has continued throughout the lifetime of the investigation nor has it influenced the protocols developed to respond to any individual who came forward.

This remains a large piece of work for the operation and it is hoped that a number of alleged perpetrators will be brought to justice in the near future. A number of cases have been concluded in the past 12 months

The volume of work involved in supporting the Police inquiry is high. There have been over seven hundred requests for research, many involve providing basic data or identifying and locating a particular child. An example of the latter was a request to identify an eight-year old boy within a particular time frame whose surname began with B. There were thirty-one possibilities and all of the files had to be read. Similarly, a man who visited a Children's home as a volunteer about a particular time with only a first name. Both were identified and the latter was subsequently arrested and charged by another Police force.

The preparation of files for court is a complex and lengthy business. The condition and quality of the files held by Lambeth is frequently poor. In order to comply with the rights of Lambeth to Public Interest Immunity and the rights of the defendant to disclosure of information the legal debate can be lengthy complex and costly. The issue for any local authority being that it is imperative that anyone recording information about a child should do so in a professional, accurate, objective and non-judgmental manner. There are enormous training implications in the evidence being found within the majority of children's files.

4.2 Other local authority homes

The criminal investigation has not been confined to Lambeth's Children's homes. There has been a history of placing children in other Local Authority establishments and private homes. The operation has looked at the care for Lambeth children in these homes [including the North Wales homes] There have been requests for information on children from other Police teams [running investigations similar to this] and subsequently analysis of files for disclosure. The C.H.I.L.E team has developed a protocol and format for supplying the information.

The investigations have led to private homes being closed, with other investigations continuing.

4.3 Employment issues

The Investigation of employment issues for Lambeth was based on a concept safe care and the duty of Social Workers towards children and families. Within the last year the C.H.I.L.E team has conducted management investigations and prepared reports for fourteen disciplinary hearings. It is not anticipated that the Team will be involved in any further work of this kind which was outside the original brief for their work .

It is important to recognise that the employment issues have been seen as ongoing and therefore any information relating to current practice has been referred

immediately. References are checked between Human Resources and the C.H.I.L.E databases and communication between the two teams is a regular occurrence.

4.4 Management of the investigation

The Management of the investigation has continued with the basic principles of the joint investigation with the focus on the vulnerability of the witnesses. This has led to a need to be aware of changing legislation, policing and case law and involvement with attempts to influence good practice in complex investigations. It is of interest that the original protocol developed for working together has stood the test of time and has not had to be re-written. Relationships between the teams are good with daily contact and joint work and a flexible approach to different agendas. There are regular requests from other Operations for Middleton protocols and for help and advice in setting up other team. There is a consistent core team that makes up C.H.I.L.E and most of them are independent.

4.5 Victim support

The experience of the last year with victim support has reinforced the decision not to set up a separate team or contact a voluntary agency but to address the individual needs of witnesses. This approach has meant that local services have been used for some, whilst others have been assisted with obtaining psychological or psychiatric services. The C.H.I.L.E team has provided some short term counselling and preparation for court for twenty witnesses Many witnesses do not want involvement with any agency and may have made a good recovery and do not wish to re-open old wounds. The demands for victim support has increased enormously in the lead up to the recent successful prosecution of William Hook.

Other work

The C.H.I.L.E team has taken on some areas of work outwith the original terms of reference as a response to the current needs of Lambeth. In addition to the management investigations referred to above The main project being an audit of Fostering in Lambeth. The objective being the safety and welfare of children placed in fostering by Lambeth. Immediate problems were referred to social services. This investigation involved 153 children and 135 carers.

The Key Outputs.

The Key outputs for the second year have been:

- The conviction and sentencing to 10 years imprisonment of William Alfred Hook having pleaded guilty to 26 charges relating to sexual abuse of boys between the years of 1970 and 1978 – Mr Hook was employed at Shirley Oaks childrens home – It is hoped that publicity surrounding this case may generate further evidence in other potential cases to be brought to trial.
- Completion of 14 management investigations leading to disciplinary charges in many cases. Fostering in Lambeth audit completed
- Intelligence gathering through files and interviewing both witnesses and victims. Support for 68 victims/ alleged victims;

The database has been in the single most valuable tool in terms of cost-effectiveness and the links between offending adults is the basis of the enquiry. It is difficult to quantify when looking at the pieces but the whole pattern that is

emerging should allow explanations to be drawn and future policy in terms of safeguarding to be established.

- The research support for Operation Middleton included 650 requests from the Police or others for research actions during the first eighteen months, the requests for the subsequent eight months has been 590 - an 85% increase in the activity prior to charging an individual and court proceedings.
- Operation Middleton/C.H.I.L.E have established a work protocol which has raised considerable interest at a National level, with requests to speak at the Welsh National Assembly, assist with the development of National Guidelines for complex abuse investigations and countless requests from other investigations for assistance in setting up teams and running inquiries.
- To date the Operation has led to the arrests of 11 people, 9 men and 2 women. Two men are currently on police bail pending further enquiries. The investigation is a systematic enquiry and further arrests are expected.

Future Work

As reported in the 1st Interim report the operation is now 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. It is hoped that over the coming months significant progress will be made in bringing perpetrators to justice whilst continuing to support victims. A detailed action plan has been developed and is being worked to.

4. Other implications –

Financial implications - In the last financial year a total budget of £0.5 million was allocated to the project and the John Barratt investigation combined. It was anticipated that the John Barratt investigation would cost no more than £50,000, with the balance of £450,000 available for the CHILE team. However, the cost of the John Barratt work was underestimated and a cost of approximately £75 -80,000 is expected to be confirmed by year end. As a consequence there is likely to be an overspend on the overall project budget of around £25-30,000 ie the proportion of the excess spend beyond estimated on the John Barratt investigation. Consideration was given to cutting expenditure on the main CHILE work in order to offset this overspend, however this was rejected as inappropriate in view of the work being undertaken.

Budgets for the current financial year have been discussed with the Met Police and it is clear that there is no prospect of making savings due to the need to retain a high level investigation for the foreseeable future. A budget of £0.475 million has been set for the 2001/02 financial year.

Audit Trail

Executive /Committee Deadline (first in cycle):		09.04.01	
Author:		Chris Lee	
Date Drafted:		10.4.01	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS/DIRECTORATES			
NAME	DIRECTORATE	DATE SENT/ RECEIVED	DATE CLEARED/ RECEIVED
L Christensen	SSHI		
Date sent to/received by Democratic Services:		11.04.01	
Date sent to Councillors:		12.04.01	

8. List of Background Documents

None