



CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

Tuesday 7 December 2021 at 7.00 pm

Assembly Hall, Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton Hill, London, SW2 1RW

Members Present: Councillor Liz Atkins (Substitute), Councillor Mary Atkins (Substitute), Councillor Nicole Griffiths, Councillor Joshua Lindsey (Chair) and Councillor Jane Pickard

Co-optees Present: Baboucarr Jallow and Lynette Murphy-O'Dwyer

Apologies: Councillor Marcia Cameron, Councillor Joe Corry-Roake and Councillor Mohamed Jaser

1 Declarations of Pecuniary Interest

There were none.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2021 were approved as a correct record of proceedings.

3 Response to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA): Lambeth Council IICSA Action Plan

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Claire Holland, apologised to all victims and survivors, and noted the failure to those whose care had been entrusted to the Council. It was also stated that:

- The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse's (IICSA) report was published in July.
- The Council had transparently worked with IICSA and had set up a Redress Scheme for survivors.
- Survivors' bravery was noted and had been central to the establishment of an Inquiry and to ensure Lambeth Council addressed its historical failures.
- Today's Council was much different and had worked hard to address the IICSA report's concerns.
- Councillors needed to ask themselves tough questions, seek assurances of practice, meet the Nolan principles of public office and fulfil their roles as corporate parents.
- The administration was committed to delivering the Action Plan and demonstrating positive change, and to ensure the profound failures of political leadership did not happen again.

- The Action Plan set out clear accountability for officers, provided robust oversight and assurance, and was a vital step in this journey, but it was essential not to become complacent.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and Chair of Corporate Parenting Board, Councillor Ed Davie, provided further comments on the Action Plan:

- He repeated the Council's apologies to victims and survivors of abuse under Lambeth's care.
- He gave apologies from Merlin Joseph, Strategic Director of Children's Services, who was unable to attend the meeting due to illness.
- It was essential to acknowledge Lambeth's troubled past, but important to recognise that the Council was now different; with robust corporate and accountable leadership, and Members were fully aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities.
- The Council's internal framework was stronger, including on risk management, statutory duties and corporate parenting, and with improved and regular scrutiny.
- The regulatory framework was more stringent and accountable, noting OFSTED's positive letter from its yearly visit published the previous week, and full inspections occurring every three years.
- The legislative framework had also fundamentally changed since the events detailed in the IICSA report, with the Council discharging duties of care in partnership with statutory outside bodies.
- Lambeth had identified learning points for the Action Plan in advance of IICSA's report; with their recommendations and findings diligently translated into the Plan to ensure positive change.
- The Action Plan recorded 50 actions, of which 10 had been fully completed; and included items such as mandatory safeguarding and corporate parenting training, further safeguards, review of Looked After Children's (LAC) placements and strengthening corporate parenting arrangements.
- All Lambeth staff and Members were corporate parents with responsibility for children's welfare.
- The Action Plan did not address all safeguarding mechanisms but responded to the IICSA report.
- Whilst safeguarding was improved, the death of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes was a reminder to remain vigilant. The Council would not be complacent and was committed to improving.
- The Action Plan was not just for Children's Services but provided oversight and scrutiny for children in care across the Council. It would be regularly reviewed and strengthened in an iterative process that would integrate children's input as underlined by Annex 4 of the IICSA report.
- The Child Friendly Lambeth (UNICEF) Initiative would further put the voice of children at the heart of Council processes do to help ensure that nothing like this happened again in the borough.

Fiona Connolly, Executive Director: Adult Social Care; Jane Carroll, Interim Director Children's Social Care; and Fateha Salim, Assistant Director: Inquiry Legal Team, provided further comment:

- Officers apologised to all victims and survivors and were deeply sorry for their experiences and that they had not been believed, noting their immense courage and bravery.
- The Council would ensure children today and in the future did not suffer similar experiences.
- Lambeth heard first-hand from survivors on the life-long impacts on them and their loved

ones, noting in particular their request to assure that children were listened to and protected.

The Sub-Committee next heard from Councillor Scott Ainslie, Green Party:

- The Plan needed to detail how Lambeth had changed and learnt from the past; measures to tackle racism such as the Council's Vernon Review into institutional racism; who were the external services providing assurance; and provide an outcome to the review of the vetting processes.
- It was requested which specific actions addressed racism or the Vernon Review.
- The Redress Scheme was not included in the Action Plan and queried why its review would be delayed until 2022.
- The Council's actions to date did not give a voice to survivors and the Green Party believed that no steps should be taken with them being fully consulted. The Shirley Oaks Survivors Organisation (SOSA) had been lauded for giving a voice to survivors, but their funding had been withdrawn, they had not seen the Action Plan and were not present at this meeting.
- Commissioning an independent visitor scheme should not wait until January 2024.
- It was queried what regular data would be provided to elected Members to undertake and fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities to LAC, as assurance and regular evidence was needed to monitor children's placements, such as had failed in a 2016 case of a child housed outside the borough.

In response to Members' questions, the Cabinet Members and officers responded:

- Racism was documented in IICSA's report as a specific feature of abuse and it was absolutely correct to address it, which the Action Plan detailed.
- There were disproportionate numbers of Black African and Black Caribbean children in the Council's care, which was reflected in the ethnicity of frontline Lambeth staff.
- The Council was implementing the Vernon Review's recommendations to tackle racism, including through Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training, and details could be provided to Members.
- The Redress Scheme was out of scope of this item nor part of this response to IICSA but was separately reported in September 2019 and would be included in final Summer 2022 report.
- External services were specified in the Action Plan to provide assurance and a whole programme of visits would be documented. It was exemplified that:
 - the Local Government Association (LGA) were to be commissioned to provide peer reviews;
 - senior Members and officers from other local authorities could give external observation;
 - OFSTED was the statutory independent regulator, and had confirmed services as 'very good' from their recent visit, with a full inspection expected within the next 6-12 months;
 - Bernardo's had been commissioned to run an independent visitor scheme; and,
 - Lambeth additionally had Independent Reviewing Officers.
- The Corporate Parenting Board regularly received updates and data on placements and visits, which was available to councillors through the Pentana system, and enabled accountability.
- A core theme from IICSA participants and throughout the Action Plan was that children's voices were paramount and those from current LAC were monitored to provide assurance.
- Every Member had access to corporate parenting training and almost all had completed

theirs. This training provided prompts to help identify abuse and offered ongoing support and guidance.

- Some local authorities in UNICEF's Child Friendly City initiative had seen other services or partners provide additional checks, such as British Gas engineers checking for signs of abuse, which Lambeth was reviewing to adopt and reinforce current measures.
- Lambeth was committed to mandatory corporate parenting training, alongside existing courses on safeguarding, EDI, and Members' roles and responsibilities; and was reviewing a mechanism to do so, such as reporting completion to Full Council.
- Training needed to be improved, including identifying indicators of abuse, and EDI training covered all Equality Act protected characteristics but could be enhanced further.
- The Member's Code of Conduct was currently under review and input was welcomed.
- The Action Plan would be under a constant, dynamic process of review.
- There would be a new intake of councillors after 05 May 2022. Member induction was often an overwhelming process, but measures were being reviewed to ensure a better balance and that safeguarding training would be one of the first courses.
- Consideration would be given to schools' roles in supporting LAC and with advice from Education colleagues, would amend the Action Plan accordingly.
- The Social Workers in Schools pilot had helped liaison between schools and the Council provided feedback to schools on the difficult domestic situations experienced by some pupils.
- Primary schools were encouraged to federate to better benefit from larger associations and to mitigate smaller schools not having the same level of in-house provision.
- Schools were required to have a dedicated safeguarding lead and all staff received safeguarding training, with further access to the Lambeth Safeguarding Children Partnership's (LSCP) training.
- All Lambeth LAC were overseen by the independent Virtual School Board.
- Only one Lambeth foster carer awaited their DBS-check but had been risk assessed.
- The Mockingbird Model or extended family model, whereby Lambeth foster homes were linked with other foster homes, provided mutual support and created extra vigilance.
- It was essential that social workers had manageable caseloads to spend quality time with children and enable them to watch, listen and observe.
- Some children did not always discuss matters of concern with their social workers and needed other trusted adults in their life, such as mentors or independent visitors, to provide stability.
- Lambeth wanted to teach children how to protect themselves and was part of its corporate parenting responsibility to ensure children's safety and provide trusted adults for them.
- Lambeth did not rely on children to report abuse, but through observation of their behaviour, could identify when abuse was taking place, but it was important not to make assumptions.
- Anyone who wanted to be a councillor should understand the core safeguarding responsibilities they would undertake as an elected representative.
- The Child Friendly Lambeth Initiative would put children at the heart of everything the Council did and further extended responsibility beyond the Children's Services directorate.
- UNICEF would aid training delivery to anyone identified by the Council, for example, schools, officials, third parties; and would be delivered over at least the next three years.
- Councillors excelled at holding each other to account either individually or through entities such as Scrutiny, regardless of political party affiliation, but could be strengthened further.
- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were presented quarterly to Cabinet and available for all.
- There was a Forum specifically for disabled children to amplify their voice.

- The Council's full range of mentoring schemes was not detailed in the Action Plan and officers would review adding in specific references.
- The trend to date was for more regulation and tightening of laws to install better practice and safeguarding; and overall children were safer today than in the past.
- A robust programme of auditing ensured all children's records were up to date and relevant.
- Further review of recording children's voices in casefiles was needed, noting that these were more for young persons than for the authority.
- OFSTED reviewed hundreds of files and reviewed the quality of case recording.
- The Interim Director of Children's Services reviewed data daily to appraise the discharging of statutory duties, alongside other internal mechanisms, to give robust assurances of safety.
- Lambeth was doing all it could to recruit social workers and the workforce remained a key priority. This included robust training offers and a current consultation on pay and retention policy across Children's and Adults' Services, to ensure low caseloads.
- Lambeth's social workers largely stayed for many years, and it was noted that temporary/locum local staff comprised some of the longest serving staff.
- The Leader of the Council had personally ensured that Children's Social Care teams improved channels of assurance between Members and officers, to better hold each other to account.
- The Council's Whistleblowing Policy would be updated to include specific reference to safeguarding and to promote the public's, partners', and staff awareness.
- The Plan would go to Full Council for approval to ensure that it was owned by the entire Council.
- The agenda pack, page 39, set out governance and oversight, noting the Plan would be reported annually to Full Council, bi-annually to Cabinet, bi-annually to the Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee, annually to Corporate Parenting Board and Children in Care Council, quarterly to the Lambeth IICSA Board, six-weekly to the IICSA Oversight Board, and quarterly at Cabinet Member Briefings; in an ongoing process of review.
- Detailed action plans below the overarching Plan were reviewed by the IICSA Oversight Board.
- OFSTED rated around 40% of all UK local authorities' services as 'inadequate' or 'required improvement', which suggested a national problem arising from underfunding.
- Lambeth had prudently managed disproportionate funding cuts since 2010, prioritising children and increasing investment – such as the 10% increase in 2022 to improve complex safeguarding.
- £500,000 had been allocated from existing resources to ensure the Plan was implemented.
- Provisions such as youth clubs were critical for many young people, especially LAC, and councillors and officers needed to know of and support these partners.
- Lambeth's Complex Safeguarding Team would focus on the changing threats to children and young people outside the Action Plan's scope, with a Lambeth model under development.
- Private foster carers remained a concern, but the Council was aware and was reviewing.
- Children placed outside London received the same services as those placed more locally; all were allocated social workers, the same visiting arrangements, access to records, and distance did not preclude Lambeth officer visitation.
- All LAC placed in or near Lambeth had access to Lambeth schools and services.
- Lambeth was reviewing its Fostering Strategy and was undertaking a recruitment drive.
- Senior officers had to give reasoned authority for distant placements, which usually

- occurred due to children's needs or the location of extended family.
- All LAC had independent reviewing officers and a social worker as a statutory requirement. Some wanted and had an independent visitor and/or mentor, but not all chose to.
- Children placed outside the borough remained the Council's responsibility, but if placement were in a children's home, then the local authority and OFSTED were responsible for that facility.
- IICSA recommended that the Council publish its draft plan, as occurred on 29 November 2021, then formally submit its response before a deadline of 24 January 2022.
- The Strategic Director of Children's Services had commissioned an independent review of borough placements to check quality and worked with Housing colleagues to reduce semi-independent placements. The Council intended to create council tenancies so care leavers in semi-independent placements were safe and had their own home with pastoral support.
- External oversight was provided by the Department for Education (DfE), OFSTED, and the LSCP which included partners such as the police. Increasing this oversight would see diminishing returns due to the cost on administration to the detriment of frontline service provision. Services would also be subject to a LGA peer review.
- Lambeth produced a self-evaluation and self-assessment every year for OFSTED.
- Essex and Islington were appointed as Lambeth's improvement partners following OFSTED's 2015 inspection until 6-12 months from the next inspection, after which they would either be renewed, replaced, or not required.
- The IICSA report criticised all of Lambeth's political culture, including trade unions. Trade Unions were integral to success, but national bodies had responded positively and were in dialogue.
- Children's welfare was a national issue and no relationship nor ideology was more important.
- OFSTED's most recent visit reviewed front-door operations, including raising concern about children. Services received around 80 per day, and OFSTED had quality accessed their advice and referrals, noting only two or three from 300 were incorrect and Lambeth had subsequently implemented recommendations.
- Where concerns did not contain sufficient evidence to escalate to the next level of social worker intervention, cases were signposted for further review and monitoring.
- Online grooming and abuse was taken seriously but was outside the scope of the IICSA response.
- Permanent placement was the desired and usually best course of action, although some returned to their birth or settled families, or were adopted; but most placements ended with permanency.
- Lambeth sought local authorities with children placed at distance to replicate Lambeth's offer.

In discussion, Members noted that it was essential to continue to:

- Hear, learn and act on issues of racism and the experience of Black African and Black Caribbean children in care.
- Monitor the Action Plan, external review and third-party monitoring.
- Remain vigilant to future abuse and continue to listen to and work with survivors.
- Explore with survivors what they wanted Members and third parties to know and remember of their experiences, particularly in relation to a proposed day of awareness.
- Ensure all elected Members and foster carers are DBS checked as early as possible.
- Provide peer-to-peer and other forms of mentoring for children.

- Transparently work with IICSA and proactively provide information on plans and monitoring.
- Ensure sufficient funding to undertake the IICSA Action Plan into the future.
- Continue to monitor semi-independent placements.
- Work with trade union partners and ensure that the current culture is maintained and regularly reviewed.
- Monitor and review low level referrals and ensure appropriate escalation.
- Ensure continuation of training on corporate parenting responsibilities for non-members, such as youth workers, teachers, and others in contact with children.
- Provide and monitor uptake of Members' and staff Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training.
- Monitor the provision of Lambeth Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) training.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To ensure that the outcomes of the Patrick Vernon Review of Race and Diversity in Lambeth Council (2020) are incorporated into the Action Plan.
2. To ensure the provision of training for elected representatives, officials, and partners:
 - a. includes noticing the signs of abuse;
 - b. includes guidance to enable proactive assurance that local services are safeguarding children
 - c. occurs early on in induction or new starter processes;
 - d. ensures the importance of a children-centred approach and voice of the child being at the heart of all decision making;
 - e. is monitored to ensure all necessary persons receive it; and,
 - f. that training encompasses all protected characteristics.
3. To ensure and provide monitoring so children in care receive the same level of support, including face-to-face contact, whether placed within or outside of the borough.
4. For political parties to review their selection processes and that all candidates are briefed and understand their corporate parenting and safeguarding responsibilities from the outset.
5. To explore school SENCOs having additional responsibilities for safeguarding children in care.
6. To review whether school Governors could have greater oversight of safeguarding and accountability by schools.
7. To ensure that the Action Plan's language is appropriately precise and written in Plain English; for example, explain what 'organisational listening' means.
8. To monitor social workers' workloads and cases, so that they are able to build relationships with young people.
9. To explore further forms of peer review and external scrutiny, such as from other local authorities and the Local Government Association.
10. To explore ways of ensuring children are empowered to recognise and report abuse.
11. To review communications between social workers and schools, especially for those children placed at a distance, and ensure effective monitoring.
12. To ensure provision of a 24/7 phone service for children to access to discuss and disclose abuse.
13. To ensure that all councillors had full access to the Pentana (the council's performance monitoring system) which holds key performance indicator information.

Work Programme Recommendations

14. To add a review of the Redress Scheme in summer 2022 to the work programme.
15. To add modern forms of abuse outside the scope of the IICSA Action Plan, such as

county lines, to the work programme for further review.

4 Work Programme

The Sub-Committee agreed to hold a separate work programming session.

The meeting ended at 9.12 pm

CHAIR
CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY SUB-
COMMITTEE

Date of Despatch: Tuesday 04 January 2022

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