

## REPORT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMISSION

### SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION IN HACKNEY.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission

29 March 2007

Classification  
**Public**

Ward(s) affected  
**All**

Enclosures

**Appendix 1**  
Safeguarding  
Review Terms of  
Reference  
**Appendix 2**  
Contributors and site  
visits undertaken

## 1 CHAIR'S FOREWORD

- 1.1 As this review progressed through the evidence gathering phase, it became apparent to me and to my colleagues that the consensus of opinion amongst those interviewed was that Safeguarding and Child Protection within the Borough had improved dramatically over the last five to six years. In addition, it was generally acknowledged that improvements continued to be made, and that the current situation compared favorably with the position a year ago.
- 1.2 However, it was equally clear that there are a number of challenges still to be faced. Like many other London boroughs, Hackney often struggles to recruit and retain the numbers of skilled permanent staff needed in this area of work. Furthermore, despite efforts to forge closer working links between all agencies involved in child protection, school representatives indicated that they often felt that communication and feedback was unsatisfactory. Recent inspections, such as the 2006 Joint Area Review, have also indicated that there is still more work to be done.
- 1.3 This report has attempted to identify some areas where further improvements could be made. As the topic of Safeguarding encompasses so many wide-ranging issues, and given the relatively short time-span allotted to this review, it was not possible to give thorough consideration to all aspects. Instead, it was decided to focus on the key areas that would most benefit from scrutiny, and to highlight other issues for future review as necessary.

*Cllr Daniel Kemp – Lead Member for the review*

## 2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This review was prompted by a number of considerations, including:

2.1.1 **Member interest:** Several Commission Members had a strong interest in the review, arising in part from involvement with local schools. In addition, the review attracted interest from Members of other Scrutiny Commissions, particularly the Health in Hackney Scrutiny Commission.

**2.1.2 Findings from the 2006 Joint Area Review (JAR):** The 2006 JAR of Hackney Children and Young People Services found Safeguarding to be adequate overall. However, although some areas of good practice were identified, others were deemed in need of improvement through external inspection. Three of the eleven recommendations from the JAR fell under Safeguarding and were designated for immediate action. An action plan was developed to ensure their implementation, and the Commission monitored progress against this action plan throughout the course of the review.

**2.1.3 Current LBH Priorities:** The Hackney Children and Young People's Plan sets out the intention to "improve the effectiveness of communication between social workers and designated teachers through improved liaison and training" and, as a specific reference to safeguarding, commits to "continue to improve how services work together on individual cases" during to 2006-09 period.

2.2 There is no single piece of child protection legislation in the UK, but rather a number of laws and guidance which, taken together, provide the legislative framework in which child protection professionals operate. Key publications include the Children's act 1989, the Children's Act 2004 and the Every Child Matters agenda, although there are a large number of other significant documents that set out aspects of child protection in more detail. All London boroughs have also signed up to the All London Children Protection Procedures, which are intended to unify child protection procedures across London.

The Children's Act 2004 sets out a duty on all local authorities to establish a local Safeguarding Children Board by April 2006. Hackney and the City of London operate a joint Board, which oversees policy direction and supports a number of sub-committees. The Board's membership is drawn from a statutory list of partner agencies, as well as representatives of other organizations who play a key role in safeguarding and child protection in the two local authority areas. The inaugural meeting of the Board was held in November 2006, although responsibility for day to day running is delegated to the Executive Sub Committee.

2.3 The terms of reference for the review can be viewed in Appendix 1.

#### 2.4 **Method**

Evidence was gathered over a period of two months at three formal Commission meetings. The Commission heard from a number of officers working within Children and Young People's Services, and from representatives of key partner agencies.

The Commission also appointed a working group from amongst its membership to lead the enquiry, namely: Cllr Chris McShane, Cllr Gulay Icoz, Mr Andrew Bridgwater and Ms Lucy Quatre. Cllr Daniel Kemp, Vice Chair of both the Health in Hackney Scrutiny Commission and the Overview and

Scrutiny Board, also expressed an interest in the review topic and was co-opted onto the working group as lead Member. In addition to the evidence heard in the Commission meetings, working group members conducted a number of interviews with LBH officers and those working in child protection in schools, including designated child protection officers, Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), social workers and police officers.

Contact was also made with a number of other relevant organisations via telephone, letter and email to request additional information. The details of visits and witnesses are given in Appendix 2.

The Commission is grateful to all those who contributed in any way to the review and hopes that the recommendations put forward will serve to enhance the support provided to young people in the Borough and to assist all those working with them.

### **3. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.1 The Commission and Working Group predominantly considered issues relating to the progress being made to meet the recommendations relating to safeguarding arising from the 2006 JAR, communication between schools and other key agencies, and social worker recruitment and retention. In compiling the findings evidence gathered has been grouped into key themes and sub-themes, and under Section 6 recommendations are presented with the relevant findings to provide context.

3.2 The following recommendations are proposed:

#### *Recommendation one*

The Commission supports the development of an electronically based referrals system that is fully aligned with processes used across all London local authorities. Members request that a report detailing how this will be implemented locally be brought before the Commission no later than December 2007.

#### *Recommendation two*

The Commission recommends that Children's Social Care help to improve communication and feedback processes to schools by establishing the following standard procedures for all social workers by September 2007 and by making these expectations available to head teachers and Child Protection Officers (CPOs):

- a. Notification by Children's Social Care to the relevant CPO by 3pm on the next full school day if:
  - i. a child protection referral not originating from the school but involving a pupil is made, whether in or out of school hours, or

- ii. any significant changes arise in cases involving either pupils currently on the Child Protection Register or pupils involved in a current child protection investigation, including the allocation of a new social worker to the pupil's case.
- b. Maximum response times for acknowledging Child Protection referrals received from schools, and clear timescales for providing updates to the relevant CPO.

*The Commission believes these issues might be helpfully taken forward by the Group Managers for Duty and Assessment.*

*Recommendation three*

The Commission recommends that the Learning Trust, in consultation with local education authorities in boroughs providing education services to Hackney-resident students, develop a best practice standard for schools for child protection file management systems and information transfer between schools. This guidance should be made available to schools in advance of the 2008-09 primary to secondary transition period.

The Commission requests that Cabinet Member for Children and Young People satisfy herself that these arrangements are adequate by no later than April 2008.

*Recommendation four*

The Commission recommends that the Learning Trust and Children's Social Care investigate the likely impact of seconding an experienced school-based CPO to work within the Duty and Assessment department of Social Care on a part-time/short-term basis, as a means to ensuring that schools' perspectives and needs may be better understood and processes improved accordingly. The Commission would welcome a report of initial conclusions by September 2007.

*Recommendation five*

The Commission recommends that the contact details for senior management in Children's Social Care previously made available to head teachers be re-circulated to all CPOs working in the borough as soon as possible, and not after the end of this school year. CPOs are requested to confirm receipt of this information.

*Recommendation six*

The Commission recommends that the Learning Trust work with schools to ensure that basic child protection training forms a mandatory part of all new staff inductions by no later than September 2008.

The Commission wishes to be advised of the steps necessary to achieve such a process by December 2007.

Recommendation seven

The Commission recommends that, once completed, the model whistle-blowing policy currently under development by the Learning Trust be marketed aggressively to all schools in the borough, in recognition of the findings of the Bichard Inquiry on this matter, which indicated that the lack of such a policy may have contributed towards the tragic outcomes in Soham.

The Commission believes all schools should have a suitable whistle-blowing policy in place by September 2008 at the latest and wishes to be advised of the steps necessary to achieve this by December 2007.

Recommendation eight

The Commission recommends that the Director of Children's Services report to the Commission by March 2008 on how they will implement the following before the end of the 2008-09 school year:

- a. increasing the inter-agency aspect of training events aimed at staff working directly with child protection issues.
- b. developing training for CPOs to include strategies for diffusing difficult situations with parents/carers involved in child protection cases and awareness of further support available.
- c. developing a support/supervision function for CPOs and other school staff undertaking challenging and confidential child protection work, similar to the supervision functions available to social workers and other professionals working in this field.
- d. further promoting ongoing whole-school child protection inset training and ensuring that all CPOs are given the necessary skills and support to deliver this training.

Recommendation nine

The Commission strongly supports the continuation and expansion of the Schools Cluster-Based Social Work Pilot Project, and requests that the project coordinators ensure the following:

- a. That the concentration of social care problems in special schools and Pupil Referral Units be recognised and steps be taken to ensure that the new arrangements provide for the extra support required by such schools.
- b. That a progress report on the impact of the project be brought to the Commission by June 2008.

### Recommendation ten

While acknowledging the difficulties of recruitment and retention amongst social workers in Hackney, and also the high level of agency staffing cover, the Commission encourages the Schools Cluster-Based Social Work Project coordinators to identify and support the placement of social workers with optimum retention potential for allocation to the schools clusters.

## **4 FINANCIAL COMMENTS**

The recommendations in the report do not require additional financial investment from Hackney. Recommendations that require improvement of processes will be delivered within existing resource and workforce through prioritisation.

The implementation of a referrals system (R1) and future changes to training support (R8) could of course have budgetary implications in the future. However that will be reviewed within the development of the report to be presented in December 2007 (R1) and March 2008 (R8).

## **5 COMMENTS OF THE INTERIM BOROUGH SOLICITOR**

The Report before members contains a number of recommendations to improve the Child Protection referral processes and communications between The Learning Trust, Schools and Children's Social Care. The recommendations are intended to support the recommendations and action plan arising from the Joint Area Review in 2006.

### Legislative Framework

The Children Act 2004 imposes a statutory duty on the Council to make arrangements to promote cooperation between partner agencies to improve the well-being of children in our area.

S.13 of the Act requires Children's Services to establish a Local Children's Safeguarding Board comprising of representative from various partner agencies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the area. The Act requires members of the LCSB to work together to establish systems and procedures to safeguard and protect children and young people.

Working Together to Safeguard Children. A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (HM Government 2006) contains statutory guidance which details how organisations and individuals should work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

The recommendations contained within this Report are consistent with the Council's duties under the Children Act 2004, Statutory Guidance, Government Policy and best practice in this area.

The recommendations contained in this Report will be passed on Overview and Scrutiny Board, Cabinet and Council in due course for further comments and sign-off.

## **6 FINDINGS**

### **6.1 Progress made in acting on the findings of the 2006 Joint Area Review**

The following recommendations formed the basis of the Action Plan put in place to meet the recommendations arising from the 2006 JAR:

- Prepare and implement a clear action plan to address weaknesses in the Council's response to referrals to social care services and file management
- Ensure every opportunity is given for children to be seen alone when assessments of children in need are being undertaken
- Ensure prompt payment of financial support to care leavers

During the course of the review the Commission heard a number of updates on progress being made against the Action Plan. At the final Commission meeting dedicated to this review on 8 March 2007, Members heard that all actions were either complete or progressing to target. The Commission notes the excellent work done to meet these targets and congratulates officers.

### **6.2 Challenges faced by school staff working in child protection**

The Working Group met with representatives from a number of schools, including mixed and single sex secondary schools, a primary school and a special school, and open and informal discussions took place regarding the challenges of child protection work in Hackney schools. The Commission is grateful for the contribution to this review made by school staff.

The primary issue of concern raised was the relationship between schools staff working in child protection and social workers, in particular surrounding issues of poor communication. The majority of those interviewed acknowledged that clear improvements had been made in this area during the past year, and many praised individual social workers that they personally knew were doing excellent work, but it was also apparent that there were still many challenges to be faced overall and continued scope for further improvement.

Concerns were raised by schools in a number of areas, and the Commission believes it is appropriate to note such comments in order that progress can continue to be made in these areas by the borough.

### 6.2.1 *The Child Protection Referral Process*

School representatives expressed the view that the current process for referring child protection concerns to Children's Social Care was too frequently felt to be laborious and time-consuming. Referral forms were still based on carbon copy paper that had to be filled in by hand and then sent by facsimile. Many schools also felt the need to back up this process by sending another copy of the referral via the postal service. Members encountered unanimous support for an e-confident system that would allow the school's designated Child Protection Officer (CPO) to download an electronic referral form from the Borough website and send it by secure email.

Another challenge for schools presented by the current system was making referrals in cases where the child lived out-of-borough, as each local authority appeared to have a different referral form. The inconvenience associated with this increased in cases where the child's address changed frequently (a common factor when dealing with vulnerable children) and the child moved across borough boundaries. In cases of referrals where the social worker allocated to the case found that the Hackney address given by the school was out of date and that the child in fact lived out-of-borough, the school was expected to re-refer the case using the new borough's procedures. All schools interviewed expressed support for the development of one universal form that could be used across all boroughs.

It is hoped that some of these concerns will soon be addressed. Like all other local authorities across the country, Hackney will be required to introduce the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) by 1 April 2008 in accordance with the requirements of Every Child Matters. The CAF will provide a process for undertaking a common assessment of a child's additional needs and a standard, nationally-recognised referral form, with cross-borough and multi-agency use.

The CAF is already being rolled out in a number of clusters across the borough, using a paper-based referral form. However, a very recent statement issued by the DfES indicates that the preferred method of deployment is a national e-CAF system. This is being trialed at five pilot sites across the UK, and the DfES is expected to make a formal announcement later this year. LBH is waiting to receive this guidance before moving forward on an e-CAF system for the borough.

Informal benchmarking with a number of other London local authorities revealed that Hackney's progress in implementing the CAF is roughly on a par with other boroughs. Many had pilot schemes running, and had provided initial training for staff, but the CAF had not yet been mainstreamed across the whole organization.

#### Recommendation one:

The Commission supports the development of an electronically based referrals system that is fully aligned with processes used across all London

local authorities. Members request that a report detailing how this will be implemented locally be brought before the Commission no later than December 2007.

### **6.2.2 *Communication, feedback and information transfer***

School representatives interviewed indicated that they felt that there was insufficient communication from Children's Social Care during the initial period of assessment of cases that had been referred. Members also encountered the perception that much CPO time was lost through chasing up referrals and trying to obtain updates on progress. If a child was not deemed to be at risk and the case was dropped this information was not always fed back to the school in a timely manner. However, once a child had been deemed to be at risk anecdotal evidence suggested that the system appeared to improve, with schools being invited to regular core group meetings and case conferences.

Senior management representatives in Children's Social Care explained that the policy on feedback to schools was quite clear, and that social workers were responsible for ensuring that schools were kept updated. Any failure to do so should be raised as a concern by the school and would be dealt with through normal management procedures. It was noted that there was a strong management team in place with a commitment to resolving any such issues.

Schools also had concerns regarding the sharing of information relating to cases involving their pupils which had not come to light through the school. They were not generally told of child protection investigations that had not been specifically referred by the school, especially those arising in the school holidays, unless made aware by the parents or carers. All school representatives interviewed felt that it should be part of the role of the social worker attached to the case to ensure that the relevant school CPO was kept informed of such cases. Additionally, they requested that they should be updated when new social workers were allocated to existing cases, as they often found that their contact for a particular child in Children's Social Care had been replaced due to staff turnover.

Staff turnover was acknowledged by Children's Social Care to be an ongoing challenge (explored further in Section 6.3), making it difficult to preserve continuity in some cases. However, it was noted that occasional gaps in communication were not entirely one-sided and that both agencies needed to work together to ensure a seamless service delivery.

School representatives also reported that, in their view, the transfer of child protection information between schools during primary to secondary transition was not adequate. This perceived problem also applied in cases of transition between mainstream and special schools, and for children transferring to and from schools in and out of the borough. CPOs indicated that the child protection files were often either not sent, or the file management system was poorly organized and issues did not come to light. It was felt that such

difficulties may be alleviated if a system were developed for child protection files to be sent directly from CPO to CPO, with a standardized system for clearly marking files.

Recommendation two:

The Commission recommends that Children's Social Care help to improve communication and feedback processes to schools by establishing the following standard procedures for all social workers by September 2007 and by making these expectations available to head teachers and Child Protection Officers (CPOs):

- a. Notification by Children's Social Care to the relevant CPO by 3pm on the next full school day if:
  - i. a child protection referral not originating from the school but involving a pupil is made, whether in or out of school hours, or
  - ii. any significant changes arise in cases involving either pupils currently on the Child Protection Register or pupils involved in a current child protection investigation, including the allocation of a new social worker to the pupil's case.
  
- b. Maximum response times for acknowledging Child Protection referrals received from schools, and clear timescales for providing updates to the relevant CPO.

*The Commission believes these issues might be helpfully taken forward by the Group Managers for Duty and Assessment.*

Recommendation three:

The Commission recommends that the Learning Trust, in consultation with local education authorities in boroughs providing education services to Hackney-resident students, develop a best practice standard for schools for child protection file management systems and information transfer between schools. This guidance should be made available to schools in advance of the 2008-09 primary to secondary transition period.

The Commission requests that Cabinet Member for Children and Young People satisfy herself that these arrangements are adequate by no later than April 2008.

**6.2.3 *Expectation gaps regarding the appropriate level of response to referrals***

School representatives commented that they sometimes felt that the response provided by Children's Social Care was not adequate to address their concerns, and in a small number of cases could place children at risk. CPOs acknowledged that they were not trained social workers and therefore were not the correct professionals to be making decisions, but also noted that in most cases they would know the child and the family relatively well and

would therefore bring a level of understanding to the case that the social worker could not access.

In some cases children who schools felt should be removed from their homes as a priority were left in the care of their parents, and other approaches such as formulating behavior contracts with the parents were applied instead. Anecdotal evidence obtained by Members from schools suggested that that in approximately a third of these cases problems would continue, leading to further referrals. Members acknowledge that such a 'snap shot' may well not be representative of the wider picture.

Senior management representatives from Children's Social Care explained that undertaking an assessment of whether a child should remain at home was a task that could only be performed by a trained social worker. However, contributions from schools were valued and taken into account, hence their involvement in core group meetings and case conferences. It was noted that removing a child from their family was an extremely serious step, and that attempts were always made to avoid this if it was felt other effective strategies could be utilized without putting the child at risk.

Another concern for schools was the response time from Children's Social Care when an initial child protection concern was reported. If a social worker did not arrive at the school to assess the child before the end of the school day and the CPO felt that the child would be at risk if sent home, Members were advised that this placed school staff in an extremely difficult position. In such incidents CPOs generally responded by keeping the child late after school and waiting for the social worker, but they felt this often increased the level of distress for the child. In one case, the CPO had felt obliged to take the child to the police station to be placed in police protection custody overnight, following a reported lack of response to a child protection referral.

Members also heard from schools that they felt general dissatisfaction regarding the out-of-hours social care service, particularly regarding the extensive amount of time taken for a call to be answered. Representatives of Children's Social Care explained that the out-of-hours service was intended for use in emergencies only, and hence had a very limited number of staff. Schools were not expected to access this service frequently as the vast majority of their concerns would arise during the school day when the main service was available.

When asked about the mechanism for raising concerns, school representatives indicated that they felt there was little to be gained from making complaints as they might not be taken up. In listening to such concerns, continuing dialogue with those contacted and in making suggestions for progressing matters, the Commission hopes to create a change in expectations. All representatives did note their excellent working relationship with the Principal Officer for Vulnerable Pupils at the Learning Trust and expressed gratitude for the ongoing advice and support they received from this source.

The Commission heard from Children's Social Care that checks and balances were built into the system and that a formal complaints procedure was in place if schools had concerns they wished to raise. Head teachers had also recently been given direct contact details for the Group Managers for Duty and Assessment, the Safeguarding Group Manager and the Deputy Director of Children and Young People's Services, so that they could contact senior management directly if they found referrals were being handled inappropriately. Representatives from Children's Social Care noted that neither the formal complaints procedure nor the option of direct contact with management had been taken up by schools.

Members feel it is possible that complaints are not getting through to senior management because schools are either unaware of the formal procedures for escalating concerns or because the communication regarding direct contact details for senior management was not sent to CPOs as well as head teachers.

#### *Recommendation four*

The Commission recommends that the Learning Trust and Children's Social Care investigate the likely impact of seconding an experienced school-based CPO to work within the Duty and Assessment department of Social Care on a short-term/part-time basis, as a means to ensuring that schools' perspectives and needs may be better understood and processes improved accordingly. The Commission would welcome a report of initial conclusions by September 2007.

#### *Recommendation five*

The Commission recommends that the contact details for senior management in Children's Social Care previously made available to head teachers be re-circulated to all CPOs working in the Borough as soon as possible, and not after the end of this school year. CPOs are requested to confirm receipt of this information.

### **6.2.4 *Training, advice and support***

Most of the training and advice relating to safeguarding in schools is put in place by the Learning Trust. The Trust ensures that all schools have designated CPOs, who receive training updates at least every two years. The Trust also offers training for the head teacher every three years, further bespoke training for the CPO as appropriate, and whole-school training at the school's request. In addition, the designated CPO is encouraged to provide inset training for the whole school. Multi-agency training is also provided through the SCB.

Members heard that a new 'Utility Guide' training video aimed at briefing school staff on child protection issues was being investigated by TLT officers. If a license for this video was obtained it would be possible to issue a copy to

every school in the borough. This would provide CPOs (trained by the Trust) with a valuable tool to use in delivering inset training to other staff members. However, as yet the funding for obtaining a license had not yet been obtained.

The school representatives interviewed appeared to be largely satisfied with the training currently available. A number of schools praised inter-agency training courses as an excellent mechanism to understand the roles of other professionals in the field and to build useful contacts and working relationships. One aspect of the training that some schools felt could be improved was how to deal with parents/carers if they became angry at perceived interference from the school over child protection issues. On making a referral the school is required to inform parents, except in extreme cases where this might put the child at immediate risk or jeopardize a criminal investigation, and schools reported that under these circumstances staff regularly encounter verbally abusive and even sometimes physically threatening behavior.

A further concern raised by some schools was the support in place to assist the CPO and other staff dealing with the difficulties and challenges of working with child protection issues on an ongoing basis. Due to the necessary confidentiality issues surrounding child protection, CPOs are not able to discuss concerns or associated pressures with other school staff. Members note that social workers are entitled to supervision sessions to help them manage this burden, but that this support is not available to CPOs, despite their frontline role in child protection cases.

As well as providing training, the Learning Trust also assists schools by offering advice on specific cases and monitoring any complaints made against school staff and subsequent investigations. In addition, the Trust provides advice and guidance on recruitment best practice, including the requirements for enhanced CRB checks. A model whistle-blowing policy for schools is also under development, in consultation with a number of CPOs.

Finally, the Trust also tracks children that go missing from school, making attempts to find out where the family has moved to and which school the child is now attending. The Trust also provides schools with advice on their curriculum, including teaching children how to keep themselves safe.

#### Recommendation six

The Commission recommends that the Learning Trust work with schools to ensure that basic child protection training forms a mandatory part of all new staff inductions by no later than September 2008.

The Commission wishes to be advised of the steps necessary to achieve such a process by December 2007.

### Recommendation seven

The Commission recommends that, once completed, the model whistle-blowing policy currently under development by the Learning Trust be marketed aggressively to all schools in the borough, in recognition of the findings of the Bichard Inquiry on this matter, which indicated that the lack of such a policy may have contributed towards the tragic outcomes in Soham.

The Commission believes all schools should have a suitable whistle-blowing policy in place by September 2008 at the latest and wishes to be advised of the steps necessary to achieve this by December 2007.

### Recommendation eight

The Commission recommends that the Director of Children's Services report to the Commission by March 2008 on how they will implement the following before the end of the 2008-09 school year:

- a. increasing the inter-agency aspect of training events aimed at staff working directly with child protection issues.
- b. developing training for CPOs to include strategies for diffusing difficult situations with parents/carers involved in child protection cases and awareness of further support available.
- c. developing a support/supervision function for CPOs and other school staff undertaking challenging and confidential child protection work, similar to the supervision functions available to social workers and other professionals working in this field.
- d. further promoting ongoing whole-school child protection inset training and ensuring that all CPOs are given the necessary skills and support to deliver this training.

*The Commission suggests that recommendations six and eight (d) would be assisted in their implementation by the purchase of a license for the 'Utility Guide' school training video.*

#### **6.2.5 The schools cluster based social work pilot project**

The majority of school representatives interviewed identified concerns regarding pressures on the CPO role within the school. CPOs are required to be part of the senior management and leadership structure within the school, even though such staff members will have other significant responsibilities. In one-form-entry primary schools the situation was reported as particularly difficult, as the CPO was likely to also have teaching commitments. The forthcoming transition to extended schools, effectively moving schools towards becoming centres for the wider community, was also expected to increase the workload of the CPO.

One school that appeared to have resolved some of the issues relating to communication and risk management detailed in the previous sections, whilst

also creating a support network for the CPO within the school, was Skinners' Company School for Girls. This school was part of the Schools Cluster-Based Social Work Pilot Project aimed at exploring the impact of basing a senior social work practitioner within a school, with responsibility for that school and five neighboring primary schools (Woodberry Down Primary, Tyssen Community Primary, Jubilee Primary, Holmleigh Primary and Harrington Hill Primary). The pilot is jointly funded by Children's Social Care and the Learning Trust.

The social worker and CPO work as a team with the Police Liaison Officer attached to Skinners' school through the Safer Schools Partnership, which has been in operation for four years. Child protection information is shared freely between these team members, with other staff being informed on a need-to-know basis. Members heard that all secondary schools would eventually have access to a dedicated police officer, but that current staffing shortages meant that some schools were not currently allocated an officer (Mossbourne and Petchey Academy) and others were sharing an officer (such as Hackney Free and Cardinal Pole, and Skinners' and Our Lady's Convent).

The pilot project to base a senior social work practitioner within Skinners' school was intended to provide early intervention work and a service to children who did not necessarily meet the threshold for referral to Children's Social Care, as well as providing general support when the school was dealing with a child protection case. Skinners' school felt that the pilot had made a dramatic improvement in addressing child protection issues within the school. In addition, representatives from Skinners' school spoke on behalf of Holmleigh Primary, one of the primary schools in the project cluster, and passed on the head teacher's strong support for the project.

The CPO at Skinners' school, claimed that many benefits had arisen from the project. Primarily she noted that the school's confidence in and relationship with Children's Social Care had dramatically improved, and that the entire referral process operated much more smoothly and effectively. All child protection referrals were now reviewed by the senior social work practitioner prior to being submitted, meaning that the referrals that were made were treated with more urgency by Children's Social Care. Communication and feedback were also vastly improved, and less CPO time was taken up in chasing information updates. Importantly, the CPO also commented that the additional support at the Tier 2 level helped to ensure that problems were resolved before escalating further, assisting with improved outcomes for the children and families involved.

The social worker involved in the pilot project, also highlighted some positive outcomes she believed had arisen from the pilot. She noted that it was much easier for her to develop good relationships with parents and carers when they perceived her to be working within the school environment, as opposed to when working in Duty and Assessment. Parents appeared to be more prepared to trust her and accept her help, and their responses to interventions were more positive.

In response to Members concerns that social workers based in schools might feel isolated from their colleagues, the social worker involved with the pilot explained that she found her new role rewarding in that it was less centred on crisis management and more focused on early intervention and prevention. In addition, she was happy to be working as part of a multi-professional team within a school, with greater opportunity to build positive relationships with the children and families she was supporting.

Additional evidence that appeared to support the positive impact of basing social workers within schools was provided by the Deputy Head and CPO for Shacklewell Primary, who explained that the trainee social worker temporarily attached to Shacklewell had made a significant contribution to dealing with child protection issues, especially through addressing problems at a Tier 2 level before they escalated.

As the year allocated to the pilot was drawing to a close, Skinners' school representatives interviewed were aware that an evaluation would soon take place to determine the fate of the project. The school was extremely supportive of continuing the project and believed that it had been a very successful undertaking. School representatives were also clear that the management structure of the project should stay the same, with the social worker remaining based within the school as part of a multi-professional team.

Subsequent interviews with senior management representatives from Children's Social Care revealed that a decision had been taken to roll out the Schools Cluster-Based Social Work Project across six clusters of schools in the borough later this year. The pilot project focused on Skinners' school and five nearby primaries, due to finish in March 2007, will be extended until June 2007 to ensure there is no gap in provision. The expanded project will be two thirds funded from the schools budget and one third from Children's Social Care. There will be twelve social workers attached to the project overall, with two working in each cluster of schools, under a total of three managers. Social workers will be based either in schools or children's centres, depending on the accommodation available.

#### Recommendation nine

The Commission strongly supports the continuation and expansion of the Schools Cluster-Based Social Work Pilot Project, and requests that the project coordinators ensure the following:

- a. That the concentration of social care problems in special schools and Pupil Referral Units be recognised and steps be taken to ensure that the new arrangements provide for the extra support required by such schools.
- b. That a progress report on the impact of the project be brought to the Commission by June 2008.

### 6.3 Social worker recruitment and retention

The nationwide shortage of social workers leads to difficulties in recruitment for the majority of local authorities. Hackney faces not only this challenge, but also the fact that the borough is not generally perceived as a desirable place to live and work, a message Members concluded is unfortunately all too often reiterated by the press. This can often mean that in order to attract quality staff, Hackney needs to be a step ahead of other employers.

Sometimes frequent staff turnover amongst social workers in Hackney also presents problems. Schools representatives interviewed noted that these ongoing staff changes hampered their ability to build long term professional working relationships with social workers, and often meant that social workers were new and lacked experience. In addition, reallocating child protection cases is disruptive and difficult for the child involved and should ideally be avoided.

However, the Commission was advised much work is being undertaken to address these recruitment and retention issues. Members heard that Human Resources representatives have recently met with all C&YP service managers and outlined a draft recruitment plan to fill each position currently vacant or covered by agency staff. New incentives for staff have been developed, including more training and development opportunities, flexible ways of working (for example, term time working or compressed hours), childcare vouchers and more housing for key workers. Flexible working patterns were considered to be a very attractive incentive, so advertisements were being jointly focused on this development and also on challenging any negativity attached to Hackney's reputation.

Members also heard that the issue of pay had been considered in detail. Hackney is now in the top quarter of all London boroughs for salaries paid to social workers. However, recent focus group research undertaken by LBH indicates that, although important, salary levels are not as high on the agenda for recruiting and retaining staff as a supportive working environment and career development opportunities.

In an attempt to remove any possible barriers to recruitment, a number of new methods have been developed to allow potential candidates to apply for positions within Children's Services:

- **Online Recruitment Management System:** The directorate have recently implemented a mechanism for enabling online job applications. This system was funded by the workforce development grant and a four hundred per cent return is expected on the investment in the first year alone.

The system enables the monitoring of a huge range of information, so recruitment strategies can be tailored to ensure that the borough is recruiting in the most successful and cost-effective way. Since going live

in February 2007 the site has had over 35,000 hits and 74 applications (96% electronically), suggesting that candidates appreciate the new functionality.

In addition, a three month pilot to advertise all jobs on the Guardian website is being undertaken, which should raise the profile of social work vacancies in the borough.

- **Rolling Panel Advertisements:** General social work positions are advertised on the website at all times. The initiative has had excellent results, with nine social workers having been recruited from the last three campaigns. As the scheme is funded entirely through internal resources and the online recruitment system, it is also very cost-effective.
- **Staff Profile Advertisements:** Regular staff profile advertisements have been run in the national and specialist press. Local and national feedback from these advertisements has been excellent.

In addition, the quality of the interview process has improved and efforts have been made to ensure standardisation across departments. A library of interview questions has also been developed for interviewers to draw from. In addition, in recognition of the fact that some candidates withdraw due to the length of the process, all applicants are now asked to bring the relevant documentation for a Criminal Records Bureau check with them to their initial interview to minimise delays.

Finally, wide-ranging attempts have been made to access more candidates, from running presentational stalls at community events within the borough to international recruitment campaigns.

A number of further steps are also being considered, including introducing web conferencing to assist further international recruitment, gathering feedback from the recruitment experience, developing an exit interview strategy and the use of new media in the recruitment process.

Another key concern identified was the number of agency staff currently filling social work roles in the borough; forty two per cent at the time of writing. Members heard that reducing this figure in favour of permanent staff was a key priority as this would ensure greater stability in the workforce and would also significantly reduce staffing costs. However, as social workers could earn higher salaries and often enjoy greater flexibility through working for agencies, it was often difficult to recruit them to permanent positions.

The current recruitment contract to supply agency staff to LBH is held with Select. Members heard that, historically, managers have often gone outside the contract to recruit temporary staff. This is being discouraged and managers are learning to use the Select contract for their agency needs, as this saves resources and also enables the internal HR department to keep track of important issues, such as whether CRB checks have been undertaken.

If Select are unable to meet the requirements of the vacant post within two days of a request being registered, then managers can look outside the contract for agency staff. This outcome is registered with Select, who in turn look to improve their processes to ensure they will be able to meet these needs in future.

Of the current agency staff employed, fifty two per cent have been provided by Select and forty eight per cent have been recruited outside the contract. Although much more work needs to be done in this area, these figures represent a significant improvement.

Members are impressed with the work being undertaken in all the areas detailed above and congratulate officers for the positive results achieved.

#### Recommendation ten

While acknowledging the difficulties of recruitment and retention amongst social workers in Hackney, and also the high level of agency staffing cover, the Commission encourages the Schools Cluster-Based Social Work Project coordinators to identify and support the placement of social workers with optimum retention potential for allocation to the schools clusters.

## **7 CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 This has been the fourth investigation conducted by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission. The review has aimed to identify some key areas that impact upon Safeguarding and Child Protection, and to put forward recommendations to support those working in this complex yet vital area and to assist in resolving some of challenges faced.
- 7.2 The Commission recognises that many of the report's recommendations require partnership working between the Local Authority and other relevant organisations and intends to hold ongoing dialogue with those on whom the recommendations have an impact.
- 7.3 Another positive issue that has been highlighted by this review is the beneficial impact of working flexibly and co-operatively across Scrutiny Commissions as required, rather than limiting input to Members of the individual Commission sponsoring the review. This joint working has allowed cross-Commission expertise to be pooled and shared, enhancing the overall quality of the review. The Commission offers particular thanks to Cllr Kemp for volunteering his time to take a role in this review.
- 7.4 Given the wide range of topics that fall under the heading of Safeguarding, it was not possible for the Commission to thoroughly investigate all issues that potentially could have been included in the review. The following issues have been identified as topic areas that may have benefited from further investigation if more time had been available:

- A more in-depth review of the extent to which Hackney's current processes meet the statutory requirements set out in safeguarding and child protection legislation
- Issues surrounding the transfer of relevant medical information between GPs and schools
- How Children's Social Care work with non-maintained schools in the Borough, in particular those established and managed by the Orthodox Jewish and Muslim communities

The Commission may wish to undertake further scrutiny of these issues at a future stage.

## **8 MEMBERSHIP OF THE SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

### **8.1 Elected Members:**

- Councillor Akhoon
- Councillor Bell
- Councillor Demirci
- Councillor Icoz
- Councillor Kennedy
- Councillor F Khan
- Councillor C McShane
- Councillor Odze
- Councillor Shaikh
- Councillor Siddiqui (Chair)
- Councillor Taylor
- Councillor Unluer (Vice Chair)

### **8.2 Co-optees:**

- Eli Anderson
- Ralph Bergmann
- Andrew Bridgwater
- Vera Edwards
- Mary Ludlow
- Lucy Quatre
- Mohammed Zeena

## **9 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

### **9.1 The following documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report or were presented to the Scrutiny Commission as part of the investigation:**

- Children Act (2004)
- Working Together to Safeguarding Children: a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (2006), HM Government
- Every Child Matters: Change for Children Programme
- Safeguarding Children in Education (2004), DfES guidance.
- All-London Child Protection Procedures
- Child B Action Plan
- Children and Young People's Plan

- Minutes of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission, 07/02/07.
- Minutes of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission, 15/02/07.
- Minutes of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission, 08/03/07.
- Desk Research in Recruitment and Retention in Social Care and Social Work (2001), Department of Health.
- Hooks & Anchors: Recruitment and Retention for the Scottish Social Services (2006), Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education.

**Lead Councillor:**

Cllr Daniel Kemp

**Report Originating Officer:**

Clair Bantin, Overview and Scrutiny Officer.