

Placement Officer's Report to Children's Homes Sub-Committee 17.11.88

Arriving in post on 1st September I was frankly appalled at the state of affairs awaiting me. Information and filing systems which are unwieldy at best and at worst unworkable. Inadequate recording procedures, with information in some cases years out of date. There were no established procedures for dealing with referrals and placements. Monitoring and control systems simply did not exist. This state of affairs did not result overnight but would appear to be the result of years of neglect and inefficiency.

Previously no record at all was kept of the number of referrals made to Children's Homes Section. From 1st September we implemented a monitoring system which not only records the number of referrals received but will also enable a more detailed analysis of the demands made on the children's homes section. In time this information will enable the section to see how far Lambeth's provision reflects the demands of the community and to identify areas of unmet need. Each month I will be submitting a report to Robert Morton (PMCH), copies of which will be available at each sub-committee meeting. (See Appendix i).

Lack of an established placements procedure led to confusion and inconsistency within the section as well as between this section and other sections/divisions. Clear guidelines have now been issued regarding procedure and documentation/information required. (Please see Appendix ii).

Information regarding children being referred was previously sketchy, inconsistent and inadequate. This was due to Placements Section not making clear what information was required. In order to ensure that basic details are available to Placements Section and to the admitting children's home we have introduced the 'Placement Request' form (see appendix iii). The form already contains revisions of the original format and (as with all other new forms/procedures) is under constant review in the light of practice.

The existing children's records filing system in placements was both difficult and time consuming to use. The method and standard of recording in the files was woefully inadequate, and in some cases years out of date. A new filing system has now been devised with new methods and standards of recording, and a quick index reference system. By the time the sub-committee meets Fola will have completed the arduous task of converting all the files to the new system. Whilst we can ensure the quality of future files and records, the inadequacies of the past will continue to plague us for years to come.

It has become apparent that there are an unknown number of children in private and voluntary children's homes who are not known to Children's Homes Section. In some cases these homes are well outside the London area and the placements were made several years ago. In order to discover the total number of Lambeth children placed in P&V homes we have set up an exercise involving Registration, Finance Section and the Area Offices. At the time of writing this report we are awaiting responses from Finance and seven of the Area offices.