



# The History of Lambeth Social Services

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Authorities had voluntary services for participation in the market philosophy and contract culture, however, there was a reluctance to alter the role of Local Authorities in the protection and welfare of children. Accountability had a strong influence on development in this area. Many changes that materialised in the early and mid eighties did so due to external events rather than practice and experience. This is exemplified by the way in which the work was done and the need to defend the agency against public criticism. In the previous decade, blame of harm on battered children in the home concentrated mainly on parents. Even in cases where workers had unsuccessfully tried to intervene. Publicity surrounding battered babies had led to the concept of Non Accidental Injury (NAI). A new post of Principle Officer was created in Lambeth's Directorate of Social Services. Operating below the Assistant Director of Personal Services. The role was to monitor and advise on the quality of the Social Work in the Personal Services Division, and also had specific tasks including to advise on specific cases and to ensure the Assistant Director was kept informed of any particular difficulty. Another task was to advise on specific cases of NAI and where appropriate, chair case conferences. Child protection work became increasingly dominant in the Local Authority's work with children. Social workers concentration had been refocused on parents harming their children. Medical involvement was increased and inter-agency work crystallised. Confidence in professionals involved in Social Services began to increase.

The Cleveland sex scandal however began to erode this idea. The notion that parents might be wrongly accused, and children unjustly removed from their parents to be placed into care was forced into the public arena by this high profile case. The result led to an almost unrelenting media focus on Local Authority accountability for protecting children and in

turn breeding a restricting defensiveness in the practice of social work with children and families. The increased awareness of physical and sexual abuse in Children's Homes had the same damaging effect, making it, along with other factors, difficult to attract workers. Scandals and media attention should rightly lead to introspection within the services but protective measures and other such reactions could well undermine the quality of work. The increase in guidance and protocols led to confusion amongst many social workers, but also meant that some felt reluctant to use their own judgement and understanding. The threat was that some professional stuck to the rulebook to ensure their own professional safety was protected.

The mid-eighties also saw the development of a conflict between social workers and local elected councillors. The former made claims that councillors were refusing to accept their judgement in an increasingly politicised environment. An inquiry was set up by the Environment Secretary, Mr Patrick Jenkin, with one of the terms of reference to look at the increasing politicisation of local councils. Working relationships appeared to have deteriorated over the last three years until they had been described as "nothing short of 'poisonous'". Sub Committee Meetings to discuss the action to be taken in particular cases had become platforms for abusing social workers and some councillors had scorned staff recommendations on the grounds that they, as elected representatives, knew more about the needs of the community (Guardian Newspaper, 2707/85). Committee meetings had turned into arguments about who knows best. Some of the polarisation's had developed along racial lines with black councillors showing distrust towards white social workers. In a meeting over half of the 1,400 employees of the Social Services Department gave a vote of no confidence against the then Chairman of

Lambeth Social Services Committee, Mrs Janet Boateng and Vice  
Chairman, Steven Bubb.

### Tyra Henry

At the time of her death in 1984 public concern, already primed by a succession of scandals and allegations with regard to the state and effectiveness of social services throughout the country, was equaled by members and officers of Lambeth council. Like the deaths of Maria Collwell and the more closely related Lisa Godfrey and Richard Frazer in the 1970s, Tyra's death would evoke outrage and questioning into the circumstances surrounding it. Like Lisa, she had been in care of Lambeth Social Services for practically all of her 10-month life. The Coker and the Pope enquiries commissioned by Lambeth were deemed unacceptable to staff and the local branch of their union NALGO, and this resulted in an Independent Enquiry being set up. In a special Committee meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1985, approval was given for the terms of reference for the panel of the Independent Enquiry into the death of Tyra. These terms of reference for the independent enquiry were to:

**Enquire in public into all the circumstances surrounding the death of Tyra Henry and their relationship to the work of the agencies concerned with her welfare; to draw both particular and general conclusions and report.**

Andrew Neil was Tyra's disturbed father, who had himself been known to Social Services as a child and had exhibited some disturbed behaviour. Her mother Clandette Henry was also known to Social Services as a child. In February 1981 when aged 15 she became pregnant by Andrew Neil. Their child [redacted] would later be placed on the Non Accidental Injury Register after suffering abuse at the hands of his father which sadly left him blind for life and mentally impaired. In the same