

RSIAP

IN CONFIDENCE

From: Arran Poyser
SSI London Region
Room 1914 Ext DPA
21 July 1987

Mr D Lambert
ACI

Our Ref: LAM/1

LAMBETH

1. Jack Barnes' minutes of 6 July and 10 July refer. We met on 21 July with Mr Osmond, Director Social Services Lambeth and Mr Pope, Assistant Director (Fieldwork) at Social Services HQ. The meeting took place at my request and lasted from 5-6.45pm. It was constructive and cordial throughout.

Whereabouts of persons accused of sexual abuse

2. The member of staff at Ivy House who was the accused of sexual abuse no longer is employed by Lambeth and the Director was unable to say where he employed but there is a possibility this was in a health authority setting. His name has never been placed on the DHSS Register. Mr Osmond reminded us that this man had been cleared by a disciplinary hearing in Lambeth. It was not possible in terms of employment legislation to refer to this matter if a reference from the Council was requested.

3. The member of staff at Monkton Street who was accused of sexual abuse remained employed in Lambeth Social Services, having agreed, for several reasons, that after a period of suspension it would be difficult to return to Monkton Street. He was cleared of any professional misconduct by the Council's disciplinary proceedings. Mr Osmond believed that he was now working in an adult setting and agreed to confirm the position forthwith.

Relationship between sexual abuse inquiries and arrests of staff on other charges

4. In respect of the inquiries at Ivy House and possible linkage between the initial enquiry conducted by a social services officer and that officer's subsequent arrest on charges of fraud, Mr Osmond made the following points:

- i. the initial enquiry had been superficial and unsatisfactory in several ways;
- ii. subsequent enquiries had been far more thorough;
- iii. staff at Ivy House could well have been confused by the conduct of the social services officer's involvement in the fraud and therefore uncertain about how fully to respond to questions about sexual abuse;
- iv. the role of the Officer-in-Charge at Ivy House being part of the fraud did point to collusion;
- v. in the claim for damages for neglect being brought by the parents of the child alleged to have been sexually abused, it was expected that Counsel for the mother would look all these issues.

vi. Mr Osmond was seeking to discipline the Social Services Officer (together with the Officer-in-Charge and [DPA]) as soon as possible. However, the Police had raised some concern that this process might have an unsatisfactory influence on the conduct of the criminal trial. Mr Osmond was pursuing the line of an early disciplinary hearing (which he expected to confirm the grounds for immediate dismissal of the officer) because to await a trial in up to 12 months hence would block a key senior post for an unacceptable length of time.

Residential Care for the Elderly - Inspection of Services

5. Mr Osmond confirmed that there were serious problems within the residential care of the elderly and although he did not think actual abuse was taking place in any of the 14 establishments, he considered the service highly vulnerable. There were many factors that contributed to this situation including

- i. 7 Officer-in-Charge vacancies plus others in post who were weak and a further 1 about to retire
- ii. longstanding recruitment problems at OIC levels, principal officer management level (the Principal Officer Homes to Elderly post has been vacant for 12 months), and, since April 1987 Assistant Director level.
- iii. The calibre of interviewees for the Principal Officer post (salary £20k+) in interviews that week had been depressingly inadequate. Similarly, the Assistant Director post had not been filled because the two short listed candidates were weak in management and professional skill areas.
- iv. Manual grade agency staff and overtime care staff cover for vacancies added to the cost of the service and where good staff were recruited there were examples of them leaving within a short time to take up appointments in management in other LAs.

6. Mr Osmond expected that the Phase II of the Panel's work (Mr Theaker et al) which had looked into aspects of the sexual abuse scenario, would be moving in the autumn towards new work on the management issues concerning care for the elderly. The terms of reference of this commission would be sent to SSI by Mr Osmond shortly. The time span and timetable appeared somewhat vague.

7. Mr Osmond accepted and welcomed the SSI proposal for inspectorial and developmental work regarding residential care for the elderly which would assist the authority tackle longstanding and deep rooted problems and be timetabled October-December 1987. It would need co-ordinating with the Panel's work (see 6 above). A meeting was agreed to explore SSI possible role further -18 August 1987.

DPA

Arran Poyser