

**THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA**

**SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE -15TH MARCH 2000**

**REPORT BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF HOUSING AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

**INDEPENDENT ENQUIRY  
BARLAVINGTON MANOR CHILDREN'S HOME**

The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee of the implications of the independent enquiry into Barlavington Manor children's home for current services.

A number of those former residents of Barlavington Manor who participated in the enquiry have indicated that they intend taking legal action against the Council. This report seeks to update the Committee on the legal situation.

This report also informs the Committee of the views of the individual complainants following their meeting with the Executive Director of Housing and Social Services.

**FOR INFORMATION**

**1 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 In 1998, the Social Services Committee agreed the appointment of Mr Keith Bilton, an independent consultant to investigate allegations made by twelve former children in care to this Borough and resident at Barlavington Manor Children's Home.
- 1.2 Mr Bilton carried out a thorough enquiry into these allegations and the report of his findings was published on 16th December 1999. Members of the Committee have been sent a copy of this report.

**2 MEETING FORMER RESIDENTS OF BARLAVINGTON MANOR**

- 2.1 The Executive Director of Housing and Social Services met with a number of the former residents of Barlavington Manor on 1st March 2000. The purpose of this meeting was to listen to their views about the outcome of the enquiry and their comments about the enquiry process as a whole. A summary of their comments is attached in Appendix A.

**3 COMMENTS BY DIRECTOR OF LEGAL SERVICES**

3.1 The Council has received several letters from solicitors representing the former residents of Barlavington Manor. These indicate intent to commence legal proceedings against the Council. The Director of Legal Services wishes to advise the Committee that at the time of writing this report, no proceedings have been issued against this authority by any of the former residents of Barlavington Manor.

3.2 The Council is in close communication with its insurers.

#### **4 IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRENT PRACTICE**

4.1 The allegations made by former residents of Barlavington Manor relate to the period 1966 to 1984. Mr Bilton has detailed in section three of his report an overview of the circumstances which prevailed during this period. These illustrate that child care practice has improved significantly following the introduction of the Children Act (1989) which greatly enhanced the statutory provision of residential care. The 'Quality Protects' initiative has been developed in response to concerns about the care received by children. This programme is further helping improve the quality of services received by children.

4.2 While local authorities should never be complacent about looking after and protecting vulnerable children and young people, there are a number of policies and measures in place today which will contribute towards preventing the scale of abuse that Mr Bilton has identified as having taken place at Barlavington Manor. For children and young people looked after by this Council, these include: -

- A climate of openness in the Council's own establishments.
- The existence of free, widely publicised helplines for young people.
- A greater awareness and training of staff in all key agencies as to the possibility of abuse taking place in both foster and residential homes.
- Regular inspection of private, voluntary and local authority residential homes including unannounced visits.
- Contact between children and members of their birth families is promoted unless there is specific exclusion by a Court.
- Looked after children receive an annual medical.
- Recruitment of residential staff adheres in most respects to the guidance recommended by Sir William Utting in "Choosing with Care".
- A widely publicised statutory complaints procedure for children and young people living away from home All looked after children and young people are given information about how to complain at the start of their placements.
- Provision of an independent advocacy scheme for looked after children and young people.

- Clear rules and regulations for appropriate punishment of children and young people living away from home.
- A review system for looked after children which focuses on the child or young person's views about their placement and contact with their family.
- Rigorous police and local authority checks on staff and foster carers upon appointment.
- On-going training for staff, particularly in relation to child protection and listening to children and young people's views.
- Independent visitors for children who require them.
- The establishment of the posts of Reviewing Officer and Effective Placements Officer which help ensure children and young people receive high quality residential care.
- An agreed inter-disciplinary and inter-agency protocol for investigating concerns.
- Foster Carer referees are personally interviewed by staff.

## **5 TRAINING IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Mr Bilton's findings highlight staff having shown a "worrying lack of curiosity" about the care children were receiving at Barlavington Manor.
- 5.2 It is proposed that the lessons from this report are used to inform training events for those staff responsible for monitoring vulnerable adults' and children's residential placements. The purpose of these seminars will be to encourage staff to be more robust in the monitoring of placements and give them the confidence to pursue and investigate concerns thoroughly, however trivial they may at first appear. It is also anticipated that these events will promote the use of the Council's corporate whistleblowing procedure.

## **6 CONCLUSIONS**

The Social Services Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

**FOR INFORMATION**

**MOIRA GIBB**  
**Executive Director of Housing and Social Services**

**Background Papers used in the preparation of this report**

Report of the Barlavington Manor Enquiry December 1999  
 Keith Bilton, MA (Cantab.) Dip. Pub. And Soc. Admin

**Officer contact**

Enquiries should be directed to Ms Laurel Sayer (telephone 020 7361 3193).

Ref. 0003ED  
 Ref. 00003ED1.doc

Appendix A

**The Executive Director of Housing and Social Services met with eight former residents of Barlavington Manor on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2000.**

**This is a summation of all the views which were expressed in the meeting. It may not be true that all of these statements reflect the views of all present.**

“We do not accept all of Mr Bilton’s report of his enquiry.

We wish the Social Services Committee to know that our experience of living at Barlavington Manor continues to affect our lives today.

We have concerns about the role of the Child Care Adviser which we believe Mr Bilton has failed to address.

We believe that the suffering we experienced whilst placed at Barlavington Manor can now only be resolved through financial compensation. Any financial settlement would give us and our children security for the future.

The majority of us would prefer to resolve this matter as soon as possible.

Any financial settlement should also be placed in a trust fund for the children of one former resident who died in 1997.

Many of us need counselling and we believe the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea should enable us to receive this. Counselling should be provided by an organisation which specialises in this field.

We believe that the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea was financially exploited by the former owners of Barlavington Manor and that the Council should therefore pursue their estate.

We note that Mr Bilton has highlighted the lack of a national requirement for residential care staff to hold a formal qualification and believe this places children currently looked after in residential establishments at risk.

We would like to know the Social Services Committee’s views concerning Mr Bilton’s report of his enquiry.”