

Exposed: raw deal forced on children in care

Polly Newton

CHILDREN in the care of Camden Council are paying the price for poor management and inadequate services, according to a highly critical report.

The District Auditor's report, which runs to more than 80 pages, reveals the rot in the service, a leading councillor said.

The report says the service needs a huge shake-up, alleging a widespread lack of planning by staff and a failure to meet young people's health and educational needs.

It also attacks the council's facilities for disabled children as "under-developed" and warns that there is no strategy to widen the range of services for the under-eights.

It says a number of children have been sent to inappropriate placements because of "inadequate care planning and controls", highlights the lack of specialist workers to cater for those leaving homes, and says there are no guidelines to help staff assess individual cases.

The report was drawn up between January and March this year when the council was still suffering the severe after-effects of a year-long strike by social workers, which ended in June 1992.

Judith Barnes, leader of the Conservatives on Camden Council and a member of the social services committee, said the District

Auditor's criticisms could not be blamed entirely on the strike.

They were partly due to a lack of investment in children's services, she said. "It's obvious the rot has gone very deep."

Harriet Garland, chairwoman of the council's social services committee, said services for children in care had improved since the strike, due partly to an increase in foster carers.

She said: "We are in no way complacent. We see it as a priority and that is why we are putting more money into the budget."

The District Auditor's report, due to be discussed by the social services committee last night, acknowledges the changes made since the end of the strike and praises the commitment of staff in helping to make those changes happen. But it says there are still areas that require attention.

The role of foster parents in educating children should be given much more attention and the health needs of many young people in care are not being met, the report says.

Simon White, Camden's director of social services, said: "This is a useful report which accurately sets out where we and other councils are at and what we need to do." The council was already acting on the concerns raised by the District Auditor, he said.

Similar reviews of children's services are being carried out at the Royal Free Hospital in Hampstead, Camden and Islington Community Health Services and Camden and Islington Health Authority.



● Employment Secretary Michael Portillo rose above jibes about Tory sleaze with the grace of a man keeping at least one eye on Number 10, when he visited Alexandra Palace last Friday.

The bright young thing of the Right was offered 10p to ask a question by at least

one teenager at the Jobscene London exhibition and declined a gift of a pen in case it were construed as a bribe.

The Army and Navy were among those with recruitment stalls at the exhibition, while the Royal Air Force upped the stakes

and caught Mr Portillo's attention with a Jaguar fighter.

"He took the time to talk to all the exhibitors and show a real interest," said a spokeswoman for TJW Exhibitions, the organisers of the event, which ended on Saturday.

Row brews over eruv property plan

Roger Blitz

A JEWISH newspaper plans to "exploit" the eruv in North London commercially by promoting it as an ideal area for orthodox Jews to buy property.

The move has infuriated eruv opponents, who say it supports their belief that the area would become a magnet for orthodox Jews and change the cosmopolitan nature of North London.

The Jewish Chronicle announced last week that it was launching a series of property advertising features called "Living Within the Eruv", the first of which is due to appear today.

Its advertisement manager Alan Rubenstein said: "The eruv is now a fact of life. It is going to happen and we have decided commercially to exploit that."

Last week, Childs Hill resident Jeffrey Segall launched a High Court challenge to Environment Secretary John Gummer's decision in September to allow the network of poles and wires to be erected around 6.5 square miles of Golders Green, Hampstead Garden Suburb and Hendon.

In Jewish law, orthodox Jews are only allowed to push wheelchairs and prams on a Sabbath if they are within an eruv boundary. The Jewish Chronicle is to run features promoting the advantages, for certain Jewish people, of living within the eruv.

Mr Rubenstein does not expect people to move out as a result of the eruv. "To those it affects, fine; to others, life will carry on as normal. People tend to overreact."

Elizabeth Lawrence, chairwoman of the Barnet Eruv Objectors Group, was surprised by the paper's eruv promotion. The group had warned at the inquiry that the eruv would lead to moves to change the area's demographic make-up. "We were told we were being hysterical and anti-Semitic, but what we suspected is becoming apparent," she said. "This is very premature on the Jewish Chronicle's part — there is a long way to go before the eruv is up."

Barnet councillor and eruv opponent Frank Davis feared that people would pay above real property values to live in the area.

But estate agents disagree. It might attract interest from minori-

ty groups and opponents might move out, said Glentree Estates chief executive Trevor Abrahamsohn. But a perceptible price change was unlikely.

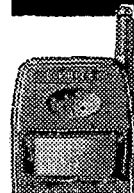
"The increase in liquidity is good for the markets and is good for stability of prices and does no harm to the estate agents operating in the area," he added. "The only difference it will make

is to regularise house prices."

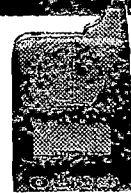
Howard Gold, of Winkworth's Golders Green office, said this area of North London would always attract the orthodox Jewish community regardless of whether it had an eruv.

"As such a large proportion of the area is going to be covered by the eruv, it is not something to highlight particularly."

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