



Child protection practices & policies in schools review 2010/11

**Lead Member's foreword**

As a mother of two young boys and an experienced primary and secondary teacher, I am passionate about seeing children learn and develop. Children can only learn and develop effectively if their physical and emotional needs are met. Providing a safe, stimulating and caring school environment is an important component in nurturing children. A safe home-life is also vital.

Unfortunately, not all children live in such an environment and it is teachers who, through their day-to-day contact with children, can play a key role in noticing the first signs of possible abuse, including neglect. This may result in a referral being made to the member of school staff responsible for child protection within the school and then perhaps outside agencies.

If signs of child abuse are not spotted at an early stage by the school, this could escalate in to a very dangerous situation for the child. Experienced teachers and school staff play a vital role in the initial stages of the child protection process. If information is not shared effectively by appropriate staff within the school (which could be more difficult in larger schools) it has little chance of being passed on to relevant external agencies.

It is important that schools have effective child protection policies that are clearly understood by all their staff. Having previously worked as a teacher in Dagenham, I wanted to find out whether there had been an improvement in the child protection practices that I had observed. I primarily wanted to speak to school staff in the borough, such as Child Protection Coordinators and Head Teachers, so as to ascertain their views and experiences of child protection policies and practices. I also wanted to scrutinise how effectively schools are able to liaise with outside agencies, such as Children's Services, with regard to children they were concerned about.

Members of the Children's Services Select Committee recognise the improvements that have been made in our schools and hope that the additional recommendations put forward in this report will help school staff to keep their pupils even safer through effective early identification and intervention of possible child abuse.

The Select Committee recognises that school child protection policies are agreed and developed by governing bodies. I hope that governing bodies will find our

recommendations a useful checklist for further development of their policies and procedures.

I have used various sources of information in this report, including statistics seen by members of the Select Committee with regard to school attendance, the frequency at which schools have been filling in forms that relate to concerns about pupils, etc; feedback from police officers who work in secondary schools and information collated from visits to a number of primary and secondary schools in the borough.

On behalf of the Children's Services Select Committee, I would like to thank all those who contributed to this review, especially all of the Child Protection Coordinators and relevant school staff who were willing to discuss this sensitive and sometimes difficult issue in a professional, honest and open manner.



Councillor Lynda Rice  
Lead Member of the Children's Services Select Committee

## **1. Introduction:**

### **1.1 National guidance and legislation:**

In 2003, Lord Laming's critical report in to the death of Victoria Climbié paved the way for sweeping reforms to the child protection system, largely based upon the Children Act 1989 sections 17 and 47, which resulted in the Children Act 2004.

Enforced by the Children Act 2004, the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda took a radically new approach to improving the wellbeing of children from birth. It was designed to end the disjointed services that failed to protect eight-year-old Victoria Climbié, and aimed to achieve better outcomes for all children by making organisations that provide services to children work better together. It also set out five key outcomes that services should provide for children; being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution to society and achieving economic wellbeing.

Schools (including independent and non-maintained schools) and further education institutions have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils under section 175 of the Education Act 2002. They should create and maintain a safe learning environment for children and young people, and identify where there are child welfare concerns and take action to address them, in partnership with other organisations where appropriate. Education staff have a crucial role to play in helping identify welfare concerns, and indicators of possible abuse, including neglect, at an early stage. They should refer those concerns to the appropriate organisation, that is the Local Authority Children's Social Care Department. They should contribute to the assessment of a child's needs and, where appropriate, to ongoing action to meet those needs.

The most important legislative and guidance documents for safeguarding children are the London Child Protection Procedures 4<sup>th</sup> Edition and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010. They provide generic statutory guidance as well as specific guidance for individual circumstances. All London Boroughs have signed up to the London Child Protection Procedures, which have unified child protection procedures across London. The Continuum of Needs and Services – A Common Model 2008 is another important document, which describes the indicators for a child with additional or more complex needs in Barking and Dagenham. A child who has complex needs has reached the threshold for the statutory requirement of the school to pass on concerns to other agencies, which would include Children's Services and/or the police. The Common Model is for everyone in Barking and Dagenham who is working with, or who has a responsibility for children, young people and families in a paid or voluntary capacity.

Members of the Select Committee recognise that many of the following report's recommendations require partnership working between the Local Authority and other relevant organisations. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 advocates that Children's Social Services must make arrangements: to promote cooperation between the authority, its partners and others with a view to improving the well-being of children in their area. This includes the children's physical and mental health and emotional well-being, protection from harm, and educational and social well-being.

Although schools will be exempt from this requirement at some time in the future, through the new Education Bill, the relationship between schools and Local Authority Social Care will

remain essential for protecting our children. The Select Committee has asked the Corporate Director of Children's Services to present and support the recommendations in her termly report to school governors, so that they might use them to review their school policies and procedures.

## 1.2 Membership

The Children's Services Select Committee (CSSC) consisted of nine councillors, two co-opted church representatives, two co-opted parent governor representatives and one co-opted youth representative.

- Councillor L Rice                      Lead Member
- Councillor E Kangethe              Deputy Lead Member
- Councillor L Couling
- Councillor R Douglas
- Councillor G Letchford
- Councillor E Obasohan
- Councillor T Perry
- Councillor B Poulton
- Councillor S Tarry
- Reverend R Gayler                      Church Representative - Church of England
- Mrs G Spencer                          Church Representative - Roman Catholic
- Mrs Tina Woodhouse                  Parent Governor - Secondary (up to November 2010)
- Mr I Ncube                                Parent Governor - Secondary (from December 2010)
- Mrs G Youssef                          Parent Governor - Primary
- Kymberley Otchere                      Youth Representative

The Scrutiny Champion for the Select Committee was Helen Jenner, Corporate Director of Children's Services, and the Select Committee was supported by Matthew Whiddett, Scrutiny Manager.

## 1.3 Methodology

Terms of reference for the review are set out in Appendix 1.

Evidence was gathered in 6 formal panel meetings held between 13 July 2010 and 9 February 2011. The Select Committee received presentations and reports from a range of stakeholders, including representatives from schools, the police, BAD Youth Forum, the Local Authority and the Primary Care Trust.

The Lead Member of the Select Committee visited a substantial number of secondary schools in Barking and Dagenham and spoke to teachers and Child Protection Coordinators with responsibility for child protection in each school. The Lead Member also visited Child Protection Coordinators in some primary schools and a local police station, where she met police who work in secondary schools. Evidence was gathered from all these visits with no preconceptions. Using the basic principles of grounded theory, an established research methodology, consistent themes emerged from the qualitative data. In April 2010, LBBD published an evaluation of patients' views and experiences of the Common Assessment Framework form (CAF) using a qualitative approach. Similarly, the following report includes views and experiences of school staff in this borough who use the CAF, and their views and

experiences of child protection practices in general.

Consistent concerns raised by school staff dealing with child protection largely form the basis of this report, in conjunction with statistics and reports presented to the Select Committee. Some examples relating to the consistent concerns raised by schools are illustrated in section 2 of the report that gathers the Select Committee's findings and recommendations.

The final report was agreed by the Children's Services Select Committee on 1 March 2011, before being presented to Cabinet on 15 March 2011 for comment, and Assembly on 30 March 2011 for agreement.

## **2. Findings and recommendations**

In compiling the findings, the evidence gathered by the Select Committee has been grouped into key themes, and recommendations are presented with the relevant themes to provide context. For ease of reference the recommendations can also be viewed as a list in Appendix 3.

### **2.1 Common Assessment Framework (CAF)**

The CAF is a central component in the Every Child Matters: Change for Children policy. The new Working Together to Safeguard Children and the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the London Child Protection Procedures include a new section on the CAF in relation to a child's safety and welfare. The CAF is a shared assessment tool to assess and identify a child's needs before they reach crisis point. One of its purposes is to reduce the number of children on the Child Protection Register. It is an holistic approach to identifying early a child's needs in the context of their development, parents and carers, family and environmental factors. It is statutory for schools to make sure that all children are achieving all of the 5 outcomes from the 2004 Education Act in the context of Every Child Matters. These outcomes are: be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution and achieve economic wellbeing. If children need more support to achieve 1 or more of the 5 outcomes then a CAF form can be initiated. The process of practitioners working together and sharing appropriate information about the same child can begin. If need be, other agencies from outside the school can also work together with the school staff and the family.

There has been a general increase in the overall use of CAF forms, which is explained by training and an increase in the number of agencies now using it, e.g. Children's Centres and Multi Agency Locality Teams (MALT). However, between September 2007 and June 2010 school staff working in 9 primary schools filled in zero CAF forms. The average number of forms being filled in by primary school staff was approximately 4 per school over this total 3 year period. One secondary school had only filled in 1 CAF form, with another secondary school filling in zero CAF forms, over the same time period.

The Select Committee had previously identified that there is an issue of unauthorised absenteeism in primary schools in the borough (also see section 2.3 of the report). Safeguarding children missing from school, or not attending school, forms part of the London Child Protection Procedures. The Select Committee is concerned that absenteeism may be an indicator of risk. Between September 2007 and June 2010, Attendance Teams linked to 40 out of 47 (85%) of primary schools in the borough did not initiate any CAFs over the whole 3 years. Of the Attendance Teams attached to the remaining 7 primary schools that initiated CAFs over the whole 3 year trend, they initiated a total of 9 CAFs. Thus, overall, Attendance

Teams attached to 47 primary schools in the borough have initiated an average of 3 CAFs per year; or 1 CAF for every 16 primary schools each year.

**Recommendation 1:**

**The Select Committee recommends greater implementation of CAF forms by all schools in the borough.**

The Select Committee believes it would be helpful for schools to evidence understanding and appropriate use of CAF forms in their school policies. This includes the need for the school to respond if they feel parents or carers are not providing basic care, ensuring their children's safety and protection.

**Recommendation 2:**

**The Select Committee recommends that schools should evidence understanding and appropriate use of CAF forms in their school child protection policies.**

The Select Committee agrees that there should be a robust central system for monitoring input of forms and subsequent outcomes.

**Recommendation 3:**

**The Select Committee recommends that the central system for monitoring input of forms and subsequent outcomes must be robust. Awareness of the system might need to be raised.**

The overall low number of CAF forms being filled in by the schools in Barking and Dagenham could suggest that some school staff do not fully understand how and why they can be used. The Lead Member of the Select Committee highlighted feedback she was given from most of the school Child Protection Coordinators she interviewed. Many were not confident about knowing the threshold levels of suspected abuse appropriate for a CAF and when to move on to the next level (to Level 3, where it is statutory to involve Children's Services or the police) and the requirement for them to fill in a Multi Agency Referral Form (MARF).

**Recommendation 4:**

**The Select Committee recommends that more training should be provided by the Local Authority for school staff who fill in CAF forms or MARFs.**

The Select Committee has been informed that school staff do not often have sufficient time to complete CAF forms. The Select Committee recognises that all schools have an identified member of staff who should be thoroughly trained in filling in CAF forms and collating and coordinating information from school staff about children's needs. The identified member of staff in charge of the CAF forms need not be a teacher. It could be a trained administrator, for example. The designated person should also be responsible for ensuring that other staff in the school who have been trained are confident in using the CAF form.

**Recommendation 5:**

**The Select Committee recommends that all schools should have an identified member of staff who is thoroughly trained in filling in CAF forms, and that this should be regularly updated. Their responsibilities would include collating and coordinating information from school staff about pupils' needs.**

## 2.2 School child protection policies

The Lead Member of the Select Committee has visited a number of schools in the borough. Often school policies on child protection have not described the detailed procedures that the school will undertake when reporting suspected abuse, referring instead to the pan London procedures. This includes the sharing of appropriate information within school and the sharing of information with appropriate outside agencies, e.g. social services, police, etc. The Select Committee recommends that all schools in the borough consider whether they need to include more process details in their child protection policies. Schools may want to include examples of what might constitute risk of significant harm, such as changes in behaviour and physical signs. School staff should be aware of the recent changes to the pan London guidance, including the latest additional risks identified by the London Safeguarding Children Board.

### **Recommendation 6:**

**The Select Committee recommends that all schools in the borough ensure that their child protection policies make clear how staff will be aware of procedures with regard to information sharing, spotting signs of possible abuse, etc.**

Moreover, the Select Committee agrees that a school member of staff who listens to a disclosure must write this down, date it, sign it and pass it on immediately to the school's identified Child Protection Coordinator. This should be a consistent feature of all schools in the borough. There should be a proper paper format e.g. a cause for concern sheet. Staff should be given a receipt so that they have evidence that their concern has been received by the Child Protection Coordinator. This procedure should be clearly written in all schools' child protection policies.

### **Recommendation 7:**

**The Select Committee recommends that a school member of staff who listens to a disclosure must write this down themselves, date it, sign it and pass this on immediately to the school's identified Child Protection Coordinator.**

All suspected cases should be directly referred to Children's Services, who work with the police in investigations of abuse. This should be clearly written in all schools' child protection policies. The Select Committee also agrees that school staff, including the Child Protection Coordinator, should not directly approach parents/carers to investigate possible cases of child abuse.

### **Recommendation 8:**

**The Select Committee recommends that school staff, including the Child Protection Coordinator, should not directly approach parents/carers to investigate possible cases of child abuse.**

### **Recommendation 9:**

**The Select Committee recommends that all school child protection policies should be easily accessible to parents and carers, e.g. available on the internet.**

## 2.3 School Attendance

Safeguarding children missing from school, or not attending school, are new additions to the London Child Protection Procedures.

The Select Committee was concerned that unauthorised absence has been increasing in some primary schools over the past 4 years and is consistently higher than our statistical neighbours, London and England (unauthorised absence has also been increasing in these 3 comparison groups). The Lead Member of the Select Committee was informed that this may be connected with recent increased rigour in the coding of absenteeism by schools. However, no evidence has been presented to account for the reasons for the consistent ongoing rise in unauthorised absence in the borough over the previous 4 years. It is also possible that reasons for the increase in the comparative data may be similar to those in this borough, yet our figures are higher. The Select Committee is concerned that unauthorised absence, especially that which is persistent, could be a child protection risk indicator. The Select Committee was surprised that more CAFs were not initiated as a consequence of high levels of unauthorised absence. The Select Committee recommends that there should be greater consistency in the use of absence codes across all schools. However, the Select Committee recognises that the Local Authority can only provide guidance to Head Teachers on how to code absence.

### **Recommendation 10:**

**The Select Committee recommends that there should be greater consistency in the use of absence codes across all schools in the borough.**

Available data presented to the Select Committee also showed that from 2006 to 2009, 256 penalty notices were issued to parents and carers, across both primary and secondary schools, only 76 of which were paid. They could be utilised as a more effective deterrent for parents/carers not willing to cooperate with the school and accepting their legal responsibility to ensure their children's attendance.

### **Recommendation 11:**

**The Select Committee recommends more consistent use of penalty notices and parenting orders by primary and secondary schools across the borough. Local Authority officers are asked to investigate whether there are any ways to increase the rate of payment of the notices.**

With regard to statistics collated for the Local Authority, the Select Committee considers that there should be a separate category for persistent unauthorised absenteeism, as opposed to simply placing persistent authorised absenteeism in the same data category as persistent unauthorised absenteeism. In the Committee's view discrete identification of persistent unauthorised absenteeism may help to further elucidate children at possible risk of abuse. Not all schools have submitted reasons for absenteeism and statistics for the different types of absenteeism. All schools should submit this information whenever this information is requested to assist the Local Authority. Attendance Officers should work with schools to tackle issues on a school by school basis.



**Recommendation 12:**

**The Select Committee recommends that the Corporate Director of Children's Services enquires whether it is possible for the national absence recording system to include a separate category for persistent unauthorised absenteeism, as opposed to simply placing persistent authorised absenteeism in the same data category as persistent unauthorised absenteeism.**

**2.4 Children's Social Care**

The Lead Member of the Select Committee visited a number of schools in the borough. She was given the following feedback when speaking to Child Protection Coordinators, Head Teachers and other school staff with responsibility for ensuring child protection and safeguarding within their school. A number of consistent concerns were raised with regard to Children's Social Care Department. These included concerns over consistent quality of social workers, being able to contact services in a reasonable time frame either by telephone, or when required to fax the MARF (the MARF is filled in if the member of staff thinks the pupils is in the immediate risk group).

The Lead Member of the Select Committee was informed by schools that there is only one fax number for MARF forms to be returned to the Children's Social Care Department. Schools stated it is consistently extremely difficult trying to telephone and fax urgent information, even after several attempts. The Lead Member of the Select Committee was informed by one school that sometimes it has taken 2 days for Children's Social Care to receive the faxed MARF from the school. The Select Committee recommends that there should be at least one dedicated fax number solely for receiving MARFs. The Lead Member of the Select Committee was informed that there is an identified member of staff in the Children's Assessment Team who regularly checks the fax machine for incoming MARFs and ensures the fax machine is turned on / functioning properly. Nevertheless, the ability to fax MARFs efficiently has been a consistent concern of schools.

**Recommendation 13:**

**The Select Committee recommends that the Divisional Director for Social Care consider whether alternative methods could be put in place for MARFs to be received into the Assessment Team.**

**Recommendation 14:**

**The Select Committee recommends that the identified member of staff in the Assessment Team regularly checks the fax machine for incoming MARFs and ensures the fax machine is turned on / functioning properly.**

The Lead Member of the Select Committee has been informed that there have been issues with adapting to the new telephone systems used by the Assessment Team but that there is always someone covering incoming phone calls during working hours. Nevertheless, the ability to contact the Children's Social Care Department by telephone to speak to a social worker has been a consistent concern of schools. A telephone exchange system, where a member of staff can put through phone calls from a central phone to different extensions may be an option.

**Recommendation 15:**

**The Select Committee recommends that the Children's Social Care teams review the new phone systems and ensure that there is always a member of staff e.g. administrator or duty worker covering incoming phone calls during working hours. Telephone calls to non-available staff should be transferred through to other staff in their absence.**

The Lead Member of the Select Committee has also been informed by schools that the answer machine(s) in the Children's Social Care Department are not always working / switched on. This is also a function of the new systems and needs to be addressed, with switch through options properly set up for all staff.

Once the school has sent the MARF, the Assessment Team does not always respond to the school within the required time scale (one working day), according to most Child Protection Coordinators.

**Recommendation 16:**

**The Select Committee recommends that the required time specifications in the referral process should be met by the Assessment Team, with schools making further enquiries where necessary.**

**Recommendation 17:**

**The Select Committee recommends that identified members of school staff responsible for child protection within schools should be informed that they can directly telephone the Corporate Director of Children's Services if they have not been able to reach other managers in the Children's Services department.**

According to some experienced school Child Protection Coordinators, the threshold seems to change with regard to what social workers think is immediate risk and the level of danger pupils seem to be in. Children's Social Care staff have a different perception. The Select Committee and Corporate Director of Children's Services agree that levels of thresholds for alleged abuse needed to trigger an intervention should be consistent, regardless of caseloads and demands placed on Children's Services.

**Recommendation 18:**

**The Select Committee recommends that guidance on levels of thresholds for alleged abuse needs to be re-circulated to re-emphasise that thresholds to trigger an intervention remain the same, regardless of caseloads and demands placed on Children's Services.**

Consistent concerns were raised by school staff responsible for child protection with the Lead Member of the Select Committee regarding social workers not arriving at the school to see the referred child in the agreed time frame. They stated that social workers sometimes do not inform them if they are going to be late, with a member of school staff sometimes waiting with the anxious child for hours. School staff have had to wait with children in a Children's Centre after the school has closed. One experienced Child Protection Coordinator stated that she regularly personally takes children to the Children's Social Care department, due to the unpredictability of waiting for a social worker to arrive at their school. Although the Children's

Social Care department has complained to the school about taking children in person, their feedback also confirmed that interventions were necessary and had taken place. Schools did comment that when social workers do arrive they usually provide a good service.

**Recommendation 19:**

**The Select Committee recommends that there should be better communication from social workers with regard to arriving late to see children at school.**

The Lead Member of the Select Committee has been informed that there are no national statutory levels for caseloads and that recent inspections and reviews indicate that caseloads are acceptable. Where they are high, managers work with social workers to ensure they are reduced. Historically this has not always been the case. Improved supervision has been important for maintaining manageable, although challenging, workloads.

**Recommendation 20:**

**The Select Committee recommends that social care managers review all reported inefficiencies and provide a feedback report on possible causes to the Select Committee in six months.**

Furthermore, inconsistent quality of team managers, who are in charge of the various duty teams in the Children's Social Care Department, is a concern of at least one experienced Child Protection Coordinator.

**Recommendation 21:**

**The Select Committee recommends that the quality of team managers and social workers should be consistently high, this being facilitated through monitoring and training**

There was clear evidence that school staff with responsibility for child protection and social workers did not always agree on thresholds of risk for statutory referrals. This seemed to indicate the need for better communication by the Children's Social Care Department and more formal taking forward of these issues by schools with the Corporate Director of Children's Services if they had any concerns.

Finally, the Select Committee wants the Children's Social Care Department to always maintain their aim to deliver the best service possible.

**Recommendation 22:**

**The Select Committee recommends that the improved practice in monitoring social workers' General Social Care Council registration be maintained. Associated staff should also continue to receive appropriate training for roles they are undertaking.**

## **2.5 Multi Agency Locality Teams (MALT) in schools**

This is a fairly new initiative and schools have informed the Lead Member of the Select Committee that they are working very well. Some school staff are worried that these teams, who are currently based in six locations, may be moved from the schools due to financial restraints. The Committee were re-assured that there are no plans to reduce these teams, and that wherever they are located they work closely with schools.

**Recommendation 23:**

**The Select Committee recommends that MALTs stay based within schools. Ideally, more schools can have this service based in their schools if they desire.**

**2.6 Bullying in schools**

The Select Committee recognises the link between child protection and bullying. No clear statistics of how many children who have been excluded for bullying were presented to the Select Committee. The Select Committee agrees that schools should report serious bullying incidents to the Local Authority. It is also concerned about the paucity of information in relation to self-harm and suicide due to a child being bullied.

**Recommendation 24:**

**The Select Committee recommends that schools report serious bullying incidents to the Local Authority through the usual child protection routes, e.g. CAF forms or MARFs. Governing Bodies may wish to consider regular reports on all bullying incidents.**

Members of the Select Committee were presented with an anti-bullying policy from one of the schools in the borough. The policy did not stipulate that incidents involving bullying should be recorded in writing. Therefore, there is no evidence that the incident occurred and this would make bullying difficult to monitor in the school. There were no clear procedures contained in the policy of how the school involved parents/carers or how the perpetrators of bullying would be dealt with. Some of the latest types of bullying include cyber bullying, the use of mobile phones and sexual misconduct. The Select Committee recommends that anti-bullying policies across the borough should consistently state that all serious incidents of bullying should be recorded in writing. There should be clear written procedures that all school staff are to follow, which should encompass the appropriate sharing of information within the school and when to involve outside agencies, if necessary.

**Recommendation 25:**

**The Select Committee recommends that school governors consider a review of their anti-bullying policies to ensure they address newer types of bullying. Also, that policies clearly state that all serious incidents of bullying should be recorded in writing, with information shared as appropriate within the school and outside agencies.**

**2.7 Police in secondary schools**

Some police officers who work in secondary schools are concerned about the growing risk of knife incidents that have been related to gang fighting outside of schools. They told the Lead Member of the Select Committee that they think secondary schools in this borough should use knife arches. The Select Committee agreed that knife arches, placed at random times in secondary schools in Barking and Dagenham, might prove an effective deterrent. The Select Committee was informed of the work undertaken by the police and Head Teachers to consider how to best address this risk, and that a locally produced play, Boy X, was recognised as being particularly effective. The placement of knife arches at schools is a matter for governing bodies to consider. Three of the secondary schools that the Lead

Member of the Select Committee visited stated that knife incidents had occurred recently in their schools.

Police statistics on weapon incidents relating to schools in the borough have been presented to the Lead Member of the Select Committee by the Corporate Director of Children's Services. Between January 2010 and January 2011, there have been 15 weapon incidents, not necessarily knives, relating to schools that have come to the attention of the police. Thus, on average, there is at least one weapon incident per month directly linked to schools that is considered serious enough to involve the police. This rate is higher if you consider that the school academic year, when holidays are taken in to account, is approximately only 9 months. The Lead Member of the Select Committee was informed by some school staff that not all incidents are reported to the police, so the true figure may be higher. The police statistics for weapon sweeps in and around schools show one incident where a claw hammer was found in bushes near the gates of a comprehensive school. Knife arches may be useful not just for detecting knives but perhaps also other weapons made of metal.

**Recommendation 26:**

**The Select Committee recommends that all secondary schools continue their work with the police to reduce the risk of knife crime in our borough.**

**Recommendation 27:**

**The Select Committee recommends that governing bodies publicise a zero tolerance approach to knives in schools. They may wish to consider the use of knife arches to demonstrate that their school is knife-free.**

**Recommendation 28:**

**The Select Committee recommends that Governing Bodies may wish to look at the reasons for and patterns of exclusions.**

Some police officers reported that the new information protocol was helping with the sharing of information held by both the school and police about pupils. The Select Committee recommends, however, that the agreed protocol should be consistently followed.

**Recommendation 29:**

**The Select Committee recommends that governing bodies may wish to review the police-schools protocol, or to invite their schools liaison officer to attend a governing body meeting.**

## **2.8 Training of School Child Protection Coordinators**

The Child Protection Coordinators that the Select Committee and the Lead Member met were experienced. Most of them had many concerns about Children's Social Care. The Select Committee received reports about the range of child protection training available in the borough. At these meetings the Child Protection Coordinators are given the opportunity to be updated on new learning, for example from Serious Case reviews. It is the view of the Committee that if meetings can only take place in the school day, all Head Teachers should allow Child Protection Coordinators and other relevant staff to attend.

The Select Committee was informed by the Lead Member that some school staff are unaware that a CAF form can still be processed without the parents' or carers' permission and that a CAF form can be attached to the MARF. There is still some confusion, especially when referring neglect, whether this would be a level 2 or a level 3 referral (when it is statutory to pass on concerns to Children's Social Care and/or the police). The Local Authority is clear that if in any doubt a referral should be made. Social workers can then offer guidance and a link to the MALT teams if the issues are not at threshold levels. The Lead Member of the Select Committee was also informed by some Child Protection Coordinators that they were concerned about excessive chastisement. More training on acceptable and unacceptable parenting and excessive chastisement in the context of various cultures, and how to work with parents to address this, would be beneficial. One member of school staff also requested some training on physical restraint, stating the Local Authority does not provide this.

One Child Protection Coordinator told the Lead Member of the Select Committee that they had not been able to access training sessions lately due to their workload, as training is usually held during the working day. The Lead Member was also informed that some staff are unable to receive CAF training until approximately 5 months time, as there are no more places left. Furthermore, that there is no training for governors by the Local Authority on child protection from January up to the end of this school year.

#### **Recommendation 30:**

**The Select Committee recommends that the Local Authority should arrange more training and meetings that allow all Child Protection Coordinators and relevant school staff in the borough to attend. This would also further allow Child Protection Coordinators to raise concerns and share ideas on good practice.**

### **3. Conclusions**

This has been the first ever scrutiny conducted by the Children's Services Select Committee to focus specifically on child protection policies and practices in our schools. The Select Committee has identified a number of consistent strengths and weaknesses in the safeguarding and protection systems in schools across Barking and Dagenham.

The CAF is not being effectively implemented in at least a number of schools. Information given to the Lead Member of the Select Committee illustrates the potential extent of this problem. On a school visit she was informed by one of the biggest primary schools in this borough that they have such a high number of children who have additional needs that they simply do not have the time or resources to fill in CAF forms. Some schools think that other agencies such as the police, GPs and housing should be initiating more CAF forms. Furthermore, some schools have given feedback to the Lead Member of the Select Committee that most parents find the CAF form too intrusive. Those parents who refuse to be part of the CAF process could be the very families who need more help. Moreover, the Lead Member of the Select Committee was informed that the school has a high number of children who fall just below the statutory level of referral.

Child protection policies across schools are not always consistent. The Child Protection Trainer for Schools has procedures to give feedback to schools on their policies and practices, and the training that is on offer to improve consistency further. The Select Committee recommends that governing bodies check that staff have the guidance they need on the specific procedures that school staff might be expected to follow, and ask them to

consider including the recommendations in this report in their own school policies. The Select Committee is concerned that if problems are not addressed in a consistent manner by schools across Barking and Dagenham and given the attention they deserve, problems for children could spiral into more serious outcomes.

All of the schools that have a Multi Agency Locality Team (MALT) based in their school were very positive about the work that the team does. School staff informed the Lead Member of the Select Committee that they are optimistic that this service will be an enormous help to the children and a good support system for the staff who have child protection concerns.

Feedback from all of the schools who contributed to this report consistently indicated that they are trying really hard to fulfil their statutory duties by referring pupils who they suspect could be suffering 'significant harm'. The Select Committee also recognises that children's social workers may be very busy. Nevertheless, consistent criticisms from the schools when asked about liaison with the Children's Social Care department included difficulty trying to contact the Children's Social Care Department and the inconsistent quality of children's social workers. Some schools perceive that this may be due to a high turnover of staff. For example, schools have reported to the Lead Member of the Select Committee numerous examples of social workers who have taken over a colleague's case but often do not know the basic information about the child they are trying to help, even when the case has reached the level of a core group meeting. Examples were given of social workers who had not even attended arranged meetings. Some Child Protection Coordinators have reported their perceptions of misguided advice given out by the department when school staff members believe there are potentially very dangerous situations. Many school Child Protection Coordinators perceive that this must be due to staffing implications, i.e. shortage of long-term social workers. All of the Child Protection Coordinators that the Lead Member of the Select Committee visited (including 5 out of the borough's 9 secondary schools) stated that there are some very good children's social workers, especially the ones who have been working in Barking and Dagenham for a few years. Evidence presented to Public Accounts and Audit Select Committee confirmed that a relatively large number of social workers working in the Children's Social Care Department are currently employed on a temporary basis. The Select Committee heard from the Corporate Director of Children's Services regarding the difficulty in recruiting permanent social workers, and the importance of not retaining the services of those social workers who are not working at appropriate standards. The number of agency and temporary posts is gradually reducing. The permanent recruitment of managers will help ensure more high calibre staff remain.

In terms of directions for future scrutiny, cultural and religious implications on child protection policies and practices within schools could be further addressed. For example, one primary school the Lead Member of the Select Committee visited was unaware that female genital mutilation could be forced upon a child as young as four years old and that it is not something just affecting secondary pupils. Some Child Protection Coordinators were also unaware that this warrants an immediate referral using the MARF. There is a borough policy on holidays in term time. Governing bodies have been asked to consider adopting this but as it is a school-level decision, approaches are not consistent. Any persistent absence should be monitored more closely, especially when these could have child protection implications such as forced marriages or female genital mutilation. With regard to the demographics of this borough, children who are most at risk of such abuse should be more closely identified.



In summary, Children's Services should continue to prioritise resources to early identification and intervention for potential and actual abuse experienced by children in Barking and Dagenham. It is our statutory duty to ensure that every child matters. Schools play a vital role in this. There may never be a perfect child protection system. However, scarce resources in the current poor economic climate should be put into early identification and intervention. It must be better for children if they are identified and helped at an early stage. Although there is learning from Serious Case Reviews in order to protect children better in future, the Select Committee feels that refined responses to early concerns would help reduce the risk of children dying unnecessarily. Early intervention may also potentially reduce costs in the long-term by reducing expenditure on the range of services that children may need to access to help them escape and /or recover from the physical and emotional abuse that they may have experienced over a period of time.

The Lead Member of this Select Committee would like to thank all those who contributed to the scrutiny process, especially busy school staff for giving their time. The Children's Services Select Committee intends to review the outcomes of the recommendations in January 2012.

#### **4. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- London Child Protection Procedures 4<sup>th</sup> Edition - London Safeguarding Children Board (2010).
- Working Together to Safeguard Children: a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children - HM Government (2010).
- Every Child Matters - HM Government (2003).
- Education and Inspections Act (2006).
- Continuum of Needs and Services – A Common Model for all agencies (2008), specifically designed for people working with children in Barking and Dagenham).
- Children's Services Select Committee (2010/11) agenda papers and minutes.
- Public Accounts and Audit Select Committee (2010/11) agenda papers and minutes.



**Terms of Reference**

- To review the quality and effectiveness of the child protection practices and policies which schools in Barking and Dagenham use to help ensure the safety and wellbeing of all of their children.
- To consider any related equalities and diversity implications.
- To report back to the Assembly with findings and recommendations in areas of practice and policy which the Select Committee has identified as requiring improvement.

**Contributors to the review**

The following people gave reports or presentations to the Select Committee:

<b>13 July 2010</b>  <b>Theme:</b> Truancy	Jane Hargreaves – Head of Quality and School Improvement
	Ann Jones – Group manager Education Inclusion
	Jay Devereux – Attendance Manager
	Greg Vaughan - Children Missing Education Manager
	Russell Taylor, Deputy Head Teacher, Robert Clack School
<b>7 September 2010</b>  <b>Theme:</b> Bullying	Meena Kishinani - Head of Children’s Policy and Trust Commissioning
	Paul Cox – Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum
	Julie Willet – Youth Worker
	Lauren Barlow - Thomas Arnold School
	Ivy Hoolas - Learning Needs Disability & Behaviour Manager
	Louise Bolton - Inclusion Advisor
<b>19 October 2010</b>  <b>Theme:</b> Child protection practices and policies in schools	Helen Jenner – Corporate Director of Children’s Services
	Jan McColm – Information Sharing and Project Assessment Manager
<b>16 December 2010</b>  <b>Theme:</b> Child protection practices and policies in schools	Elaine Ryan (Safeguarding Lead Education)
	Avraamis Avraam - Group Manager, Safeguarding, Quality and Review
<b>18 January 2011</b>  <b>Theme:</b> Child protection practices and policies in schools	Paul Jordan, Head teacher, Thames View Infant School
	Sergeant Evers and PC O’Sullivan, Metropolitan Police
<b>9 February 2011</b>  <b>Theme:</b> Child protection practices and policies in schools	Elaine Ryan (Safeguarding Lead Education)
<b>1 March 2011</b>  <b>Theme:</b> Child protection practices and policies in schools	Chris Martin (Assistant Director Children’s Complex Needs & Social Care)

The Select Committee is very grateful to all those who contributed to this review.

## List of Recommendations

The review's recommendations are set out here as a list, for ease of reference.

**Recommendation 1:**

The Select Committee recommends greater implementation of CAF forms by all schools in the borough.

**Recommendation 2:**

The Select Committee recommends that schools should evidence understanding and appropriate use of CAF forms in their school child protection policies.

**Recommendation 3:**

The Select Committee recommends that the central system for monitoring input of forms and subsequent outcomes must be robust. Awareness of the system might need to be raised.

**Recommendation 4:**

The Select Committee recommends that more training should be provided by the Local Authority for school staff who fill in CAF forms or MARFs.

**Recommendation 5:**

The Select Committee recommends that all schools should have an identified member of staff who is thoroughly trained in filling in CAF forms, and that this should be regularly updated. Their responsibilities would include collating and coordinating information from school staff about pupils' needs.

**Recommendation 6:**

The Select Committee recommends that all schools in the borough ensure that their child protection policies make clear how staff will be aware of procedures with regard to information sharing, spotting signs of possible abuse, etc.

**Recommendation 7:**

The Select Committee recommends that a school member of staff who listens to a disclosure must write this down themselves, date it, sign it and pass this on immediately to the school's identified Child Protection Coordinator.

**Recommendation 8:**

The Select Committee recommends that school staff, including the Child Protection Coordinator, should not directly approach parents/carers to investigate possible cases of child abuse.

**Recommendation 9:**

The Select Committee recommends that all school child protection policies should be easily accessible to parents and carers, e.g. available on the internet.

**Recommendation 10:**

The Select Committee recommends that there should be greater consistency in the use of absence codes across all schools in the borough.

**Recommendation 11:**

The Select Committee recommends more consistent use of penalty notices and parenting orders by primary and secondary schools across the borough. Local Authority officers are asked to investigate whether there are any ways to increase the rate of payment of the notices.

**Recommendation 12:**

The Select Committee recommends that the Corporate Director of Children's Services enquires whether it is possible for the national absence recording system to include a separate category for persistent unauthorised absenteeism, as opposed to simply placing persistent authorised absenteeism in the same data category as persistent unauthorised absenteeism.

**Recommendation 13:**

The Select Committee recommends that the Divisional Director for Social Care consider whether alternative methods could be put in place for MARFs to be received into the Assessment Team.

**Recommendation 14:**

The Select Committee recommends that the identified member of staff in the Assessment Team regularly checks the fax machine for incoming MARFs and ensures the fax machine is turned on / functioning properly.

**Recommendation 15:**

The Select Committee recommends that the Children's Social Care teams review the new phone systems and ensure that there is always a member of staff e.g. administrator or duty worker covering incoming phone calls during working hours. Telephone calls to non-available staff should be transferred through to other staff in their absence.

**Recommendation 16:**

The Select Committee recommends that the required time specifications in the referral process should be met by the Assessment Team, with schools making further enquiries where necessary.

**Recommendation 17:**

The Select Committee recommends that identified members of school staff responsible for child protection within schools should be informed that they can directly telephone the Corporate Director of Children's Services if they have not been able to reach other managers in the Children's Services department.

**Recommendation 18:**

The Select Committee recommends that guidance on levels of thresholds for alleged abuse needs to be re-circulated to re-emphasise that thresholds to trigger an intervention remain the same, regardless of caseloads and demands placed on Children's Services.

**Recommendation 19:**

The Select Committee recommends that there should be better communication from social workers with regard to arriving late to see children at school.

**Recommendation 20:**

The Select Committee recommends that social care managers review all reported inefficiencies and provide a feedback report on possible causes to the Select Committee in six months.

**Recommendation 21:**

The Select Committee recommends that the quality of team managers and social workers should be consistently high, this being facilitated through monitoring and training.

**Recommendation 22:**

The Select Committee recommends that the improved practice in monitoring social workers' General Social Care Council registration be maintained. Associated staff should also continue to receive appropriate training for roles they are undertaking.

**Recommendation 23:**

The Select Committee recommends that MALTs stay based within schools. Ideally, more schools can have this service based in their schools if they desire.

**Recommendation 24:**

The Select Committee recommends that schools report serious bullying incidents to the Local Authority through the usual child protection routes, e.g. CAF forms or MARFs. Governing Bodies may wish to consider regular reports on all bullying incidents.

**Recommendation 25:**

The Select Committee recommends that school governors consider a review of their anti-bullying policies to ensure they address newer types of bullying. Also, that policies clearly state that all serious incidents of bullying should be recorded in writing, with information shared as appropriate within the school and outside agencies.

**Recommendation 26:**

The Select Committee recommends that all secondary schools continue their work with the police to reduce the risk of knife crime in our borough.

**Recommendation 27:**

The Select Committee recommends that governing bodies publicise a zero tolerance approach to knives in schools. They may wish to consider the use of knife arches to demonstrate that their school is knife-free.

**Recommendation 28:**

The Select Committee recommends that Governing Bodies may wish to look at the reasons for and patterns of exclusions.

**Recommendation 29:**

The Select Committee recommends that governing bodies may wish to review the police-schools protocol, or to invite their schools liaison officer to attend a governing body meeting.

**Recommendation 30:**

The Select Committee recommends that the Local Authority should arrange more training and meetings that allow all Child Protection Coordinators and relevant school staff in the borough to attend. This would also further allow Child Protection Coordinators to raise concerns and share ideas on good practice.

## Terms and abbreviations

<b>CAF</b>	Common Assessment Framework
<b>CPC</b>	Child Protection Coordinator
<b>CSSC or Select Committee</b>	Children's Services Select Committee
<b>ECM</b>	Every Child Matters
<b>LBBB</b>	London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
<b>LCCP</b>	London Child Protection Procedures 4 <sup>th</sup> Edition
<b>MALT</b>	Multi Agency Locality Team
<b>MARF</b>	Multi Agency Referral Form