



HILLINGDON  
LONDON

## Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee 2010

### **A Review of how the Council works with partner agencies to provide safeguarding for children at Heathrow Airport as a port of entry**

#### Members of the Committee:

Cllr Catherine Dann (Chairman)  
Cllr Brian Crowe (Vice Chairman)  
Cllr Judith Cooper  
Cllr Peter Curling  
Cllr John Hensley  
Cllr Anita MacDonald (Labour Lead)



#### Other Voting Representatives for Education Issues:

Anthony Little - Roman Catholic Diocesan Representative



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

# **Reviewing current arrangements and future plans for safeguarding children at Heathrow Airport as a port of entry**

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## **CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD**



*Child trafficking is a very important and sensitive topic, addressing the interests of innocent young children. Following the devastating earthquake in Haiti this year which has left numerous children orphaned, I believe this review to be very timely and therefore I am very grateful to have been given the opportunity to review how the London Borough of Hillingdon tackles the issue.*

*Although the number of trafficked children coming through Heathrow Airport has decreased in recent years it remains the duty of the Local Authority to continue to keep these numbers as low as possible. The Committee hope that their review recommendations will be endorsed to minimize the prospect of child trafficking via Heathrow Airport as a port of entry.*

*The evidence presented by each witness providing an insight into the services tackling this difficult yet subversive matter allowed the Committee to understand the delicacy of the situation. The Committee and I are grateful to each and every person who took the time to attend Committee meetings. Therefore, on behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank the external witnesses and officers for participating in the review. We hope it can be used to make constructive improvements to tackling the issue of child trafficking..*

**Cllr Catherine Dann**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **What is child trafficking?**

*“Exploitation shall include at a minimum, the exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”* – United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking on Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the UN Convention on Transnational Organised Crime 2000 (The Palermo Protocol). This is the internationally accepted definition of human trafficking adopted by the majority of countries across the world, including the UK.

Child trafficking is the movement of children for the purpose of exploitation. Trafficking can affect children of all ages although research indicates that the majority of victims in the UK are 12 years or older at the point of discovery (source: ECPAT). Throughout this report the term child will be used to describe anyone under the age of 18 as laid out in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child.

The trafficking of children is a process made up of 3 distinct phases; recruitment, movement and exploitation. The recruitment phase can involve deception, coercion, violence or being sold to a third party. It can also involve the child going willingly with an adult because they believe they are going to a better life. There is no requirement to prove physical threat or coercion to determine if the child has been trafficked. If the child is moved from one place to another person, then the child is a victim of trafficking.

Under international law it is accepted that a child cannot consent to his or her own exploitation and so even if a child agreed to travel from one place to another, this could still be considered human trafficking if there is the intent to exploit them along the way or at the final destination. The movement of a child can occur across international borders or within one country.

In the UK children are trafficked for sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, forced labour, including restaurant and catering work, manual labour, drug trafficking, begging, petty theft, benefit fraud, cultivation of cannabis and selling counterfeit goods such as DVDs. There is also evidence of children being brought to the UK for forced marriage and illegal adoption. Fortunately, there is no evidence to date that children are being trafficked into the UK for organ removal.

### **Background: Overview of the Children's Asylum Service and the role of the Referral and Assessment Team**

Heathrow Airport is the world's busiest international airport and it is situated in the London Borough of Hillingdon. Hillingdon Children and Families service have to deal with the complexities of safeguarding significant numbers of children and young people who arrive at this port of entry every year. The Children and Families Service have developed a specialist intake service to address issues of child safeguarding and age disputes. Heathrow Airport is operational 24 hours a day; children and young people can be referred at anytime of day or night. Indeed statistical evidence demonstrates that over 90% are referred outside of the hours of 9.00 am and 5.00 pm Monday to Friday. It is also clear that each new arrival must have, in order to maximise safeguarding, a rapid and skilled service that is delivered immediately on referral. The dedicated airport intake team has enabled Hillingdon to provide such a response to contacts from UK Border Agency UKBA at Heathrow's five terminals and is a unique service.

### **Safeguarding arrangements**

Safeguarding of children arriving at Heathrow is a high priority for Hillingdon Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) and the Child Trafficking Sub Group. Staff in Children's Services work very closely with partners including the police and immigration service in relation to safeguarding young people who may be victims of trafficking and/or other forms of exploitation. Staff in teams across the service have developed specialist skills in safeguarding children and young people who arrive from abroad. Out of hours referrals are

managed by standby staff who are on call. Cases are transferred into the appropriate team by the next working day. All UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child(ren)) cases are dealt with by the Asylum Service. Non USAC cases are dealt with by the Referral and Assessment Team. Each service area carries out all statutory and specialist assessments. These teams have developed skills in undertaking age assessments and assessments of children and young people who are believed to be the victims of trafficking. The Asylum Service has contributed to the development of the Trafficking Toolkit which is now being used nationally. The ToolKit provides a process and procedure for assisting with the identification, assessment and notification of children who may be at risk of being trafficked.

Trafficking is a complex issue however over the last two years Hillingdon has been working closely with UKBA and the policing agencies to disrupt the trafficking of children through Heathrow and put in place strategies to discourage young people from leaving the care of Hillingdon children's services. This has led to a reduction of young people who have gone missing and the number who have been returned has increased.



The above graph represents referrals in relation to Heathrow for the past three years.

2006/07 251 total children, 70 went missing

2007/08 221 total children, 54 went missing

2008/09 160 total children, 20 went missing

Hillingdon faced a particular challenge in relation to Chinese young people going missing soon after arrival. Due to strategies implemented and intelligence employed this pattern has been severely disrupted and there has been a significant reduction in the arrival rate and numbers of Chinese young people going missing.

The ability to respond rapidly and identify potential victims of trafficking at the earliest possible opportunity after arrival has also had a positive effect in relation to our work in identifying vulnerable children/young people and the numbers going missing.

However, the profile of trafficked children and young people is subject to frequent change and does not apply to only one nationality. The increased communication between all services through the recently implemented fortnightly Trafficking Operational Group has led to rapid identification of common factors in the stories and profile of those presenting, sharing of information and intelligence and co-operation leading to both identifying potential victims and potentially disrupting organised crime.

### **Key Developments**

- Hillingdon has developed unique local level, multi-agency operational protocols to combat Child Trafficking and prevent Missing Children at ports of entry. This Protocol includes fortnightly operational meetings held at the offices of UKBA to consider all children individually who have come to notice through the airport terminals. The terms of reference for this operational meeting stipulates core membership of the group, and includes all relevant key law enforcement agencies, such as the Metropolitan Police, [Paladin team], Borough Police and the Heathrow Intelligence Unit, as well as UKBA and Children's Social Care. This operational work is the

first of its kind, and a model of best practice. The terms of reference for this group and the Protocols are being sought by ports of entry throughout the UK. [Staff from Hillingdon have been to Manchester airport, Birmingham, Stansted and Gatwick to share best practice]

- The LCSB in Hillingdon has established a multi-agency sub group focused on Child-trafficking to lead policy and practice. Representation at this group includes not only local public and voluntary sector agencies but also includes National NGO's; National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children (ECPAT), Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) and Children First, as well as the Private Sector; British Airports Authority (BAA) and the Group 4 Securicor (G4S). This demonstrates that Hillingdon is influential on a national level and is taking a national lead with policy issues which affect points of entry.
- Hillingdon Child Trafficking leaflets have been developed in 10 different languages and are being rolled out to Ports of Entry across Europe. One Example being Denmark, as Copenhagen is a transition airport for many children trafficked into the UK. These leaflets will also be included in the National Trafficking Toolkit, which is linked to the national referral mechanism administered by the United Kingdom Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC).
- Hillingdon has developed a bespoke Stand by Service to provide a flexible and skilled professional response at the Airport terminals. A virtual team set up from experienced 'day time' staff who are available between 5pm and 9am, and also includes weekends, provides this service.
- Hillingdon's strong partnership working with UKBA and Policing Agencies, such as the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) and Scotland Yard has disrupted the trafficking of children through Heathrow Airport. This has

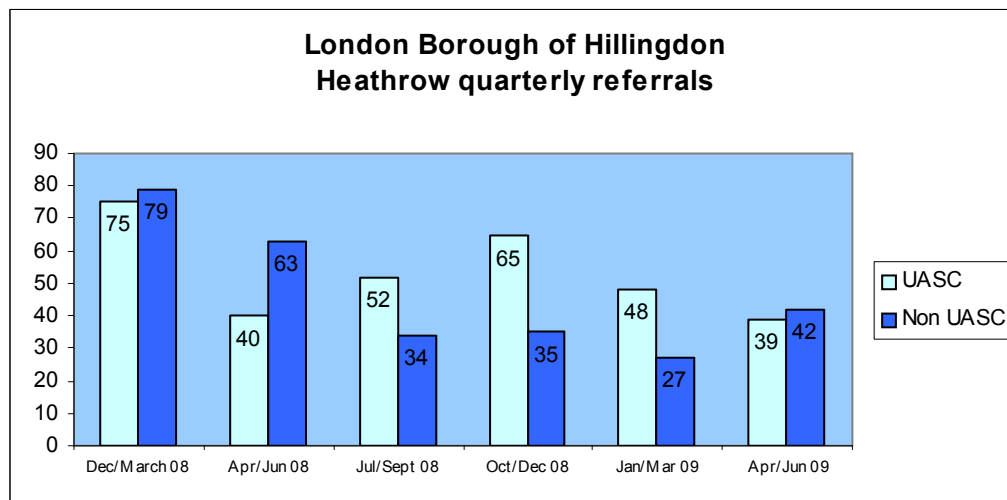


resulted in both a significant reduction in the number arriving at Heathrow and the number of young people who have gone missing (chart 1)

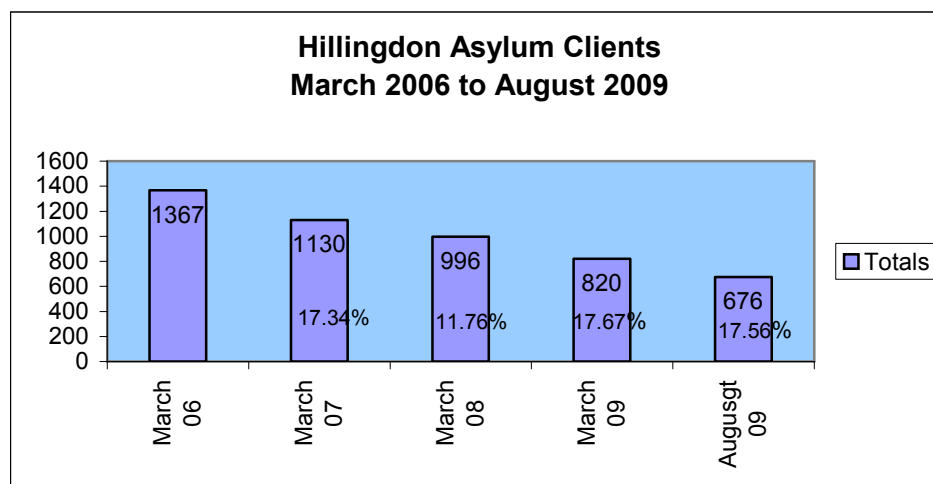
- Statistical information demonstrates that the joined up approach described in this document has impacted upon the numbers of children and young people arriving. The trends in terms of those that go missing has been greatly reduced and the opportunities for law enforcement agencies to capture intelligence and take action against offenders has gone up.
- The work has been recognised by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED), the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DSCF) and the Home Office as a model for best practice particularly in the area of child trafficking

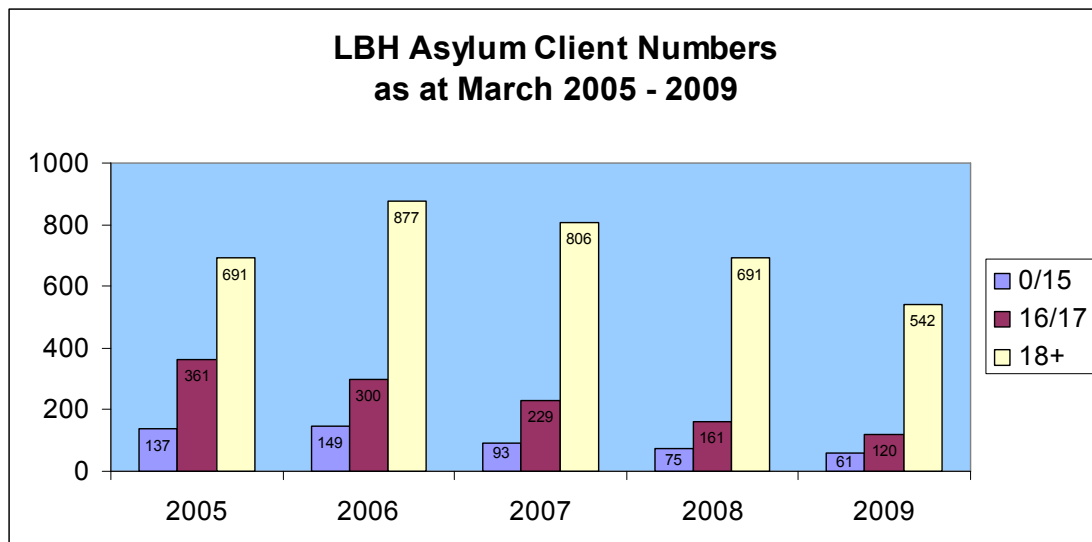
<b>Chart 1</b>			
<b>Asylum Service</b>			
<b>Missing Clients</b>			
	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>2008/09</b>
<b>Afghani</b>	1	8	5
<b>Albanian</b>	1	2	0
<b>Chinese</b>	63	32	4
<b>Congolese</b>	1	1	0
<b>Indian</b>	1	6	6
<b>Iranian</b>	0	1	0
<b>Iraqi</b>	0	0	1
<b>Nigerian</b>	0	3	2
<b>Palestinian</b>	1	0	0
<b>Somalian</b>	1	1	1
<b>Syrian</b>	1	0	0
<b>Vietnamese</b>	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>20</b>

## B. Children's Asylum Service



The Asylum Service currently supports just under 700 children and young people 155 who are Looked after Children and 540 Care Leavers





All Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children under 16 on arrival are placed in foster care with a few placed in our specialist residential unit.

### **Accommodation**

The Service provides a range of semi- independent and shared accommodation for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. All accommodation is of a high standard and in addition to young people having allocated workers the service commissions a range of outreach support via Notting Hill Housing Group and a voluntary organisation Aphelia.

### **16-18 year olds**

A 47 room supported unit providing self-contained units and including 3 emergency rooms for newly arrived young people and a 26 room unit and 1 disability room are staffed and of a very high specification and standard.

### **Mother & Baby Accommodation**

20 flats/bed sits for sole occupancy

5 shared houses

### **18+ Accommodation**

90 shared houses (350 rooms)

The Asylum Service has low numbers of NEET (Not in Education Training or Employment) with the majority (85%) of children and young people in education, training or employment. As at 1<sup>st</sup> March 2009, 695 young people **101 (15%)** are NEET. Included in the NEET figures are very newly arrived young people (9); Missing (10); Prison/ Detained (4). **121 (24%)** of our 18+ care leavers (**total 514**) are in Higher Education.

### **Well-being Project (WBP)**

A mainly Department of Health funded project which for the past 4 years has provided specialist mental health assessment and treatment including individual and group work and creative therapies for UASCs. For example the Orientation Memory Box offers newly arrived young people support in relation to emotional and physiological needs and assist their successful orientation and integration into the UK. The WBP also offers consultation, training and support to staff carers and interpreters.

### **The legal framework**

International agreements and legal instruments relevant to trafficked and exploited children include:

- ⦿ Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005).
- ⦿ The Yokohama Global Commitment agreed at the Second World Congress on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Yokohama, 2001).
- ⦿ The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), its Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2000) and the Optional Protocol on the Involvement on Children in Armed Conflict (2000).
- ⦿ The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (2000).

- ⑥ International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 182 concerning the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (2000).
- ⑥ The Declaration and Agenda for Action agreed at the First World Congress on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Stockholm, 1996).

In 2000 trafficking became enshrined in international law for the first time through the Palermo Protocol within the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. The Protocol defines trafficking as: *“The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered ‘trafficking in persons’ even if this does not involve any of the means set forth.”*

UK Legislation and guidance relevant to trafficked and exploited children includes:

- The Children Act 1989.
- The Children Act 2004.
- The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- The Sexual Offences Act 2003.
- The Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants etc) Act 2004.
- Adoption and Children Act 2002.
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2006).
- What to do if you’re worried a child is being abused (2006).
- Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution (2000) (currently being revised).
- ⑥ The UK Action Plan on Tackling Human Trafficking (2007).

### **Connections with Other Strategies**

- Children and Young Peoples Plan
- Hillingdon Safeguarding Children’s Board

### **Reason for the Review**

To provide recommendations to Cabinet in support of the Council's efforts to further support the development safeguarding duties with regard to young people who arrive unaccompanied, bringing together all the key aspects and necessary information to advance the service.

### **Aim of the Review**

To review the statutory safeguarding duties of the Council and other agencies with regard to young people who arrive unaccompanied and to review current practice.

### **Terms of Reference**

1. To learn more about the world and dangers of Child Trafficking;
2. To understand how we safeguard newly arrived vulnerable children and young people, including assessment and intervention;
3. To understand the role of key agencies and seek assistance on the effectiveness of partnership working;
4. To investigate if there are further developments to best practice which can enhance current services to promote safeguarding and reduce the risk of trafficking;
5. To examine best practice elsewhere through case studies, policy ideas, witness sessions and visits;
6. After due consideration of the above, to bring forward positive and practical policy recommendations to the Cabinet in relation to the Council's approach to Child Trafficking in Hillingdon.

## **METHODOLOGY**

As part of their review, the Policy Overview Committee received reports, presentations and heard from witnesses.

Meetings held in January, February, March and April 2010 involved taking evidence from a range of witnesses:

- Amanda Reid, UK Border Agency, Heathrow Operations
- Detective Inspector Gordon Valentine, Metropolitan Police
- Jane Graver, Head of Care, Respite Unit
- Richard Nash, Manager, Children & Families Team, LBH
- Paula Neil, Manager of Asylum Team, LBH
- Debbie Haith, Head of Safeguarding, LBH

The Committee sought to gain information on the following issues:

- How far does the existing provision meet the needs of this group of children?
- Are there any particular pressures / issues affecting Hillingdon?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of current approaches?
- What changes can be made in Hillingdon?
- How should agencies work more effectively together to address the issues facing the safeguarding of children?
- Are there any particular issues in Hillingdon affecting good safeguarding practice?

The findings from this review are presented in the following section of this report.

## **EVIDENCE & FINDINGS**

The following evidence was gathered at the witness sessions, which took place at the Committee meetings in January, February, March and April 2010.

### **Statistics**

- 2006/07 251 arrivals of which 28% (70) went missing
- 2007/08 221 arrivals of which 24% (54) went missing
- 2008/09 160 arrivals of which 13% (20) went missing
- 2009 to date 184 arrivals of which 4% (7) have gone missing.

In 2006/7 a significant number of young people went missing, a large proportion of who were from a Chinese background. This was largely due to an uncoordinated approach from the multi-agencies involved in the process of safeguarding at the port of entry; UKBA, Met Police and LBH.

During the latter part of 2008 a major break through occurred when a Chinese female who had previously absconded from a borough respite unit returned. She had been held against her will and prostituted. She assisted in delivering key messages to new arrivals about what may happen to them should they abscond. This together with arrests made outside of the UK by UKBA significantly disrupted the trafficking of Chinese nationals through Heathrow.

### **Interagency Coordination**

Immigration was the first point of contact with the trafficked child. The Asylum Team worked very closely with Immigration at the Heathrow Port of Entry due to the need to provide intense support to the children in the first few days after arrival. The level of support available out-of-hours had also increased due to a larger capacity of staff available to respond to children arriving at Heathrow Airport.

The Paladin team at Heathrow was a joint unit of Metropolitan Police Officers and UK Border Agency staff with immigration backgrounds and their remit is



to deal with all cases involving vulnerable children. These ranged from referrals from the front line, where there were child protection concerns to major criminal investigations involving child trafficking across borders.

The Paladin Team was the largest Child Abuse Investigatory Group in the world. The team worked closely with the Social Services teams in London Boroughs. Along with tackling child trafficking, the Paladin Team investigated child murders and child abuse. The biggest strength of the Paladin team was the number of police officers and UKBA officers involved in the team. The Paladin team also engaged outside bodies such as NSPCC, London Borough of Hillingdon and ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers). ACPO investigated child trafficking with the help of other crime agencies.

In 2003, the Paladin Team provided the Home Office with 26 recommendations that, if adopted, would help tackle the problem of child trafficking. Every recommendation was agreed and put into practice.

The most effective way to tackle child trafficking would be by using a multi-agency response. The excellent communication links that had been created in the last few years had led to a significant reduction in the number of children going missing from the Heathrow Port of Entry.

The Heathrow Operations Team was involved in raising staff awareness of the problem of child trafficking and ensuring staff were confident enough to cope in a situation where suspected traffickers were confronted. The work of the team involved stopping any unaccompanied child under the age of 18, making enquiries to determine the reason of visit of the child and interviewing the child in a comfortable and suitable environment.

A visit by the then Prime Minister Tony Blair to T5 allowed the Heathrow Operations team to highlight the problem of child trafficking with the PM. Following his visit, an “unaccompanied by” visa was launched to be used by all children under the age of 18 and must state who the child was travelling

with. Following this introduction, the number of children travelling alone reduced significantly.

The UKBA worked closely with airlines and airports that referred any suspicious behaviour to the UKBA. After a child was referred by the UKBA to LBH it was the safeguarding team's priority to ensure the safety of that child. The team also assisted agencies in preventing child trafficking by attending regular meetings and sub-groups.

Regular meetings took place between inter agencies and officers from other boroughs. This ensured that the problem was tackled laterally. The links that had been established between multi-agencies, councils and the police were commendable. Without these links, officers would not be able to tackle the problem of child trafficking.

### **Trends and Patterns**

The Asylum Team supported unaccompanied minors who ranged from under 16 year olds to 24 year olds. Many of these children were assessed as being victims of child trafficking and some pleaded asylum. The awareness around child trafficking had risen to a higher level and as a result the London Borough of Hillingdon was very proactive in their response to this activity. The level of understanding around child trafficking and the level of support available had developed significantly in the last few years. For example, it had been noted that profiles and patterns between trafficked children varied according to the differing ethnicities of the children.

### **Residential Units**

Staff at respite units worked very closely with the child to ensure that they were as comfortable as possible. Staff understood that the child would be frightened of their new surroundings and therefore treated the child with respect and care. The child was made to feel safe, but most children appeared withdrawn and traumatised at first.

Children were monitored at all times and accompanied in and around the centre. The profiling of the children allowed trends to be established, which led to fake stories being picked up early on. Children were usually told what to say by their traffickers and therefore it was difficult for staff to unveil the truth about their origin and purpose of their visit.

A significant number of trafficked children are female. Witnesses said that some of these females are pregnant on arrival and appropriate accommodation and support is provided for them.

Most children were afraid of returning home due to unpaid fees to traffickers. Children had been bought here on a promise of a better life and therefore did not want to return home. However, some children agree to 'voluntary removal' and are returned home where it is possible and safe to return home.

Residential units have classrooms where children can be taught and a library where the children can further their knowledge. The cook in the unit was very creative and tried to involve the children as much as possible. Medical issues were dealt with very seriously and each child was screened for any medical issues relating to their country of origin. Children were assessed and only then allowed out of the centre alone, for example to travel to college. The units are funded by central government and the UKBA asylum grant.

Due to a combination of increased education around child trafficking and improved communication between immigration, the police and the Asylum Service and Referral & Assessment Teams the information about each child was shared at fortnightly meetings. This allowed better intelligence, better sharing of information and less disruption of the assessment period when the child arrives. This in turn led to a reduction in the number of children going missing from respite unites, as their needs were anticipated and patterns were developed which were flagged up by staff to ensure certain children were monitored very closely.

### **Aid from Country of Origin**

It was apparent that there was a lack of support from the child's country of origin. It was possible for immigration to track down the route of the child, but the route was usually extremely long-winded and had taken months to complete. Therefore embassies of other countries were reluctant to help as it was difficult to prove that the child was there and the purpose of the child's visit. Nevertheless, the Country of Origin was not important when protecting a trafficked child. A child coming in from the Far East was treated in the same way as a child coming in from the EU.

### **Areas Requiring Further Development**

The London Borough of Hillingdon had done very well in developing the standard of the asylum service and the safeguarding of trafficked children. The development of the provision of resources had also helped this process. One area which needed developing was the level of training and support available for foster carers. Foster carers needed to be trained on the risks involved when a child tries to escape and how to monitor the child when they cannot be cared for by the carer. More support was needed in the early days following the fostering of a child. Witnesses informed the Committee that foster carers got an initial briefing but were not specifically trained in caring for trafficked children. Specific skills were necessary when working with this group of children which needed to be developed.

### **Foster Care**

Private fostering was defined in section 66 of the Children Act 1989. A private fostering arrangement arose when a child under 16 years (or under 18 if disabled) was to reside for more than 28 days in the care of someone who was not a parent, close relative, or someone with parental responsibility (these close relatives were defined by the Act as grandparents, brother, sister, uncle or aunt whether of the full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership or step-parent). Parents and private foster carers were required to notify the local authority of a private fostering arrangement. A person who proposed to foster a child privately must notify the appropriate local authority of the proposal at least six weeks before the private fostering arrangement

was to begin; or where the private fostering arrangement was to begin within six weeks, immediately.

Many private fostering arrangements were not notified to the local authority for a variety of reasons, not all of them associated with a risk of serious harm. Identifying a child who was privately fostered was not the same as identifying a child who has been trafficked. Nevertheless, some children in private fostering arrangements were vulnerable to being exploited in domestic servitude, other forms of forced labour, or even to sexual exploitation. It was difficult for practitioners to identify these children and, therefore, to track their movements and hence monitor their welfare. However, it was important to consider whether a carer, whether or not they present as a relative, was maintaining a private fostering arrangement in order to exploit a child for their own gain. Staff or volunteers in an agency who believed that a child may be privately fostered, whether or not they have suspicions or concerns about trafficking or other forms of abuse, should contact local authority children's social care.

Local authorities had the following statutory duties in relation to private fostering:

- identify private fostering arrangements;
- visit the home and assess the suitability of the arrangement in terms of the child's welfare; and
- visit the child regularly, and monitor and keep records of the placement.

Such enquiries should help practitioners be alert to signs that the child is being exploited.

### **Media Interest**

The timeliness and importance of an exceptionally topical subject was addressed by local press in a borough-wide newspaper article following a useful witness session (Appendix A).

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**The Committee reviewed the duties, functions, performance of and services providing safeguarding for children at Heathrow Airport as a port of entry. Taking into account user and professional experience, below is a summary of the Committee's conclusions.**

**The Committee conclude:**

1. The Committee would like to commend the current ways in which the Council is working with partner agencies to provide safeguarding for children at Heathrow Airport.
2. There is a need for better interagency communication. This would allow different agencies to share expertise, best practise and information regarding emerging trends and patterns. In turn, this information could be used to tackle the issue with a better foundation of knowledge about the problem and the results should echo this improvement.
3. Training for foster carers needs to be developed. The Local Authority needs to ensure that carers are best suited for the task at hand and were fully capable of caring for a child.
4. There is a desirability of cooperation, involvement and support from embassies of countries where children are being trafficked from to enable better communication links and an inter-nation effort to help confront the problem of child trafficking.

Following this evidence, we therefore recommend that the Council develop the way in which it works with partner agencies to provide safeguarding for children at Heathrow Airport as a port of entry provision in accordance with the following recommendations to be approved by Cabinet.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Following the review of how the Council works with partner agencies to provide safeguarding for children at Heathrow Airport as a port of entry the Committee would like to bring the following key points to the attention of Cabinet:

**That Cabinet consider the following proposals to improve and develop the services which provide safeguarding for children trafficked through Heathrow Airport and ask officers to progress those that they support.**

**The Committee recommend that:**

- a.) A bespoke training programme is developed for foster carers and residential staff who care for this group of vulnerable of children.**
- b.) Inspections take place at foster homes by officers – this can be performed through supervising social worker visits to foster carers to review the safeguarding arrangements.**
- c.) The communication links between partner agencies are developed further through the work of the Trafficking Sub Group of the Hillingdon Safeguarding Children’s Board and national and international links are strengthened.**
- d.) That Cabinet are aware of changes which may occur at a national level that could affect the viability of the Safeguarding policy in the future – information will be monitored and missing children will be regularly reported to Hillingdon Safeguarding Children Board. This information will form part of future Safeguarding reporting arrangements to Committee**
- e.) Cabinet invites the Education and Children’s Services Policy Overview Committee to review the council’s approach to safeguarding trafficked children, should at a later date, national**

**policy and legislation on this matter alter direction so that Cabinet are made aware of potential changes policy changes at a national level that could affect impact on safeguarding arrangements.**



>> HOW SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT TACKLE THE ISSUE OF ASYLUM SEEKERS?

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# The battle to smash child trafficking

The final stages of an inquiry into child trafficking were held at Hillingdon Civic Centre this week. Reporter **DAN COOMBS** found out what Hillingdon Council is doing to help the children who come into its care, and how it worked to smash an international people smuggling ring

**T**HE issue of child trafficking is a truly global problem – and this borough finds itself on the front line. Because it includes Heathrow Airport, Hillingdon Council is the 'port authority' responsible for the welfare of all unaccompanied under-18s who arrive at the airport.

Although the council has been involved in wrangles with Whitehall over the grant it receives to deal with the problem, much more serious is the fact that, since 2006, 144 of 732 unaccompanied minors have absconded.

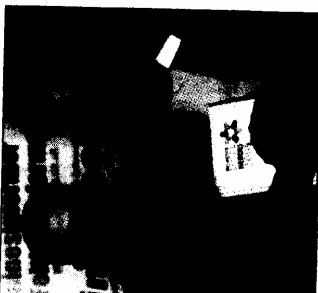
The statistics are telling: 70 of the 144 disappeared between 2006 and 2007, and 63 of those children were Chinese. It was clear an international criminal gang was at work at that time. Since then, huge strides have been made by immigration and border agencies and Hillingdon Council's care providers. Between 2007 and last year, the number of young people absconding from care was about the same as the single year figure for 2006/7. To understand how a child can slip

through the cracks it is necessary to see what occurs when they first arrive. Heathrow is a 24-hour airport and there is no respite from arrivals. Statistics show 90 per cent of unaccompanied children and young people touch down outside the hours of 9am-5pm.

Therefore a dedicated care team from Hillingdon is on call around the clock to respond rapidly if they receive a call from the UK Border Agency (UKBA) telling them a child in need has arrived.

Not every unaccompanied child is a victim of trafficking; many arrive genuinely to claim asylum. It is the job of UKBA to determine the specifics of each case, while Hillingdon's teams are needed to safeguard the welfare of the child, irrespective of the circumstances. Speaking to councillors at last Thursday's policy overview meeting were Jane Graver, head of care at a residential home in the borough, and Paula Neil, the home manager.

Ms Graver said: "When a child arrives at Heathrow, immigration is their first point of contact and we work closely with the staff. We need to place the child immediately.



**■ SUCCESS STORY: Former asylum seeker Akhtar Jan receives his Citizen of Courage award from Uxbridge College principal Laraine Smith**

"We are there to offer support, especially in the first few days and weeks of their arrival, when they most need it. We are informed if the child may be high risk, and we do our own risk assessment. If they come with a phone, we may detain it. This is because a child who is a victim of trafficking would be contacted by phone to arrange a meeting, and they could be forced into working illegally, for example to pay off a debt.

Ms Neil explained how scared, disorientated children are taken under the wing of her staff. She said: "Our priority is making them feel comfortable. Our job is not to

## MISSING CHILDREN

2006/7 251 total children, 70 went missing  
2007/8 221 total children, 54 went missing  
2008/9 160 total children, 20 went missing

Nationality	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009
Afghani	1	8	5
Albanian	1	2	0
Chinese	63	32	4
Congolese	1	1	0
Indian	1	6	6
Iranian	0	1	0
Iraqi	0	0	0
Nigerian	0	3	2
Palestinian	0	0	0
Somalian	1	1	1
Syrian	1	0	0
Vietnamese	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>20</b>

judge, ours is to provide care. "How they come into the country is predominantly UKBA's concern. But through talking with lots of the children we build up certain profiles.

"For example, those from China often have similar stories and say the same things. In cases of trafficking this is because they are told what to say. "This information we gain is fed back to immigration, and we now have fortnightly meetings and intelligence sharing, which is incredibly helpful."

Because of these strategies, the high number of Chinese children going missing from care has dropped from 63 in 2006/7 to just four last year.

Leaflets developed by the borough team in 10 different languages have been distributed across Europe.

As the asylum process takes so long, often more than a year, it is important the youngsters – a large proportion of whom are girls – live normal lives. They cannot be locked up, so they are persuaded that to stay where they are is in their best interests.

Ms Neil said: "Even after a young person has stayed for several weeks you can never be sure as to their intentions. "The stories they give as to their background may not be entirely accurate, and while a few actually decide they want to go back home and we have helped facilitate that, many are in fear as to what will happen if they do. However, on the whole the children are very compliant and stay around because they have access to education."

For every story of illegally trafficked children, there is a success story. Recently the Gazette's Citizen of Courage award went to Akhtar Jan, now 23, who arrived unaccompanied at Heathrow aged 16, unable to speak English. Granted asylum, he went on to achieve A-level results good enough to gain him a place to study medicine at Queen Mary's University.

It is these stories of hope which give the borough's asylum care services inspiration.

● Now the final witness session into the council's unaccompanied child policy has been heard, a report and recommendations for improved practice will be compiled

## **Glossary of Terms**

<b>ACPO</b>	Association of Chief Police Officers
<b>ARC</b>	Application Registration Card
<b>ASUs</b>	Asylum Screening Units
<b>BIA</b>	Border and Immigration Agency
<b>CAF</b>	Common Assessment Framework
<b>CAIU</b>	Child Abuse Investigation Unit
<b>CAMHS</b>	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
<b>CEOP</b>	Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre
<b>CTN</b>	Coming To Notice
<b>CRB</b>	Criminal Records Bureau
<b>CROP</b>	Coalition for the Removal of Pimping
<b>CPS</b>	Crown Prosecution Service
<b>DCSF</b>	Department for Children, Schools and Families
<b>DH</b>	Department of Health
<b>ECPAT</b>	End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes UK
<b>GUM</b>	Genito-Urinary Medicine
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organisation
<b>LAC</b>	Looked After Child(ren)
<b>LSCB</b>	Local Safeguarding Children Board
<b>NASS</b>	National Asylum Support Services
<b>NRUC</b>	National Register for Unaccompanied Children
<b>NSPCC</b>	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
<b>UAS</b>	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker
<b>UASC</b>	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child(ren)
<b>UKBA</b>	United Kingdom Border Agency
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UKHTC</b>	United Kingdom Human Trafficking Centre
<b>YOT</b>	Youth Offending Team