

**London  
safeguarding  
children board**

A joint initiative by:  
NHS London  
Metropolitan Police Service  
London Directors of Children's Services  
Chairs of London LSCBs  
London Probation Service  
London Councils

**Community  
Partnership  
Project Report**

### **Acknowledgements**

The London Safeguarding Children Board thanks the London Boroughs of Brent, Camden (and particularly Voluntary Action Camden), Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Newham and Southwark and their community partnership advisers for their participation in this project.

The London Board thanks NCH-The Bridge for undertaking the file audits and for providing an excellent basis for this final report, the London Borough of Croydon, the Metropolitan Police and the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service for their invaluable input throughout the project.



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## Community Partnership Project summary

A key objective for the Community Partnership Project was to engage local minority ethnic communities and faith groups in safeguarding their children, focussing on four specific areas of child abuse: female genital mutilation, honour based violence, abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession and child trafficking and exploitation. The project ran in eight London boroughs, each of whom appointed a community partnership adviser (CPA) to identify and engage with local communities and faith groups.

### Project conclusion

By using dedicated personal outreach to establish contact, **the London Community Partnership Project has been extraordinarily successful** in engaging socially isolated / excluded communities and faith groups both on specific child protection issues and also on a range of other issues which contribute to the welfare and safety of London's children.

Statutory agencies were able to increase their own knowledge and awareness of the issues facing local communities and faith groups through their participation in this project, and the creation of cross-London partnerships will further help improve their responses to these communities.

**A key project finding** is that successful engagement depends largely on a respectful and culturally sensitive approach, rather than on the ethnicity and cultural / religious background of the outreach workers.

**A key project recommendation** is that this type of partnership with local communities and faith groups needs to be sustained and promoted across London as a means of developing communities' capacity for promoting their own cohesion and integration into London society.

### Project findings

#### Practice and case work

1. The children within the local communities and faith groups reached by this project have an improved chance of being safe.
2. Communities are keen to protect their children, and there is scope for capacity building to help them to do so. Communities invariably bring their own priority issues:
  - Discipline and issues related to the tensions between the first and second generations of immigrant families (i.e. parents struggling with their children's 'lack of respect' for their mother culture's values and norms, children struggling with 'strict or restrictive' parenting);
  - Truancy;
  - Substance misuse;
  - Gangs and weapons;
  - Sexual promiscuity, especially for girls and young women;
  - Domestic violence.
3. Communities generally make little use of statutory services and want information on schools, healthcare (especially GP registration), immigration, benefits etc. Their primary requirement is for information giving, signposting and referral.
4. Successful engagement depends on dedicated personal contact. The appointment of CPAs, who were able to focus exclusively on this area of work, was key to the success of the project.

5. The effectiveness of personal contact depends largely on a respectful and politically sensitive approach, rather than on the ethnicity and cultural / religious background of the outreach workers.
6. Communities and statutory agencies need to develop mutual trust and understanding, with communities and faith groups often unclear about the roles and responsibilities of statutory services. This can only be achieved through sustained commitment to local community and faith group engagement, and the short term nature of this Community Partnership Project exposes it to accusations of 'tokenism'.
7. Many communities are unfamiliar with UK law in relation to the threshold between lawful and unlawful child rearing practices. Although this issue is not specific to minority communities, their additional isolation from other mainstream services and society exacerbates the situation.
8. As a result of this project, the profile of culturally sensitive safeguarding children issues has been raised for communities and faith groups, and also for the participating statutory services.
9. Many of the children and young people engaged through this work were open to discussion and debate around their beliefs and experiences, and are keen to be able to influence their own communities on safeguarding issues.
10. Through dedicated outreach, statutory services significantly improved their knowledge of local communities and faith groups, particularly on issues such as:
  - Differences within communities, which can relate to a family belonging to a particular clan or to when the family / community settled in the UK;
  - Differences of perspective between the older / younger, male / female and community members / leadership within communities;
  - The trend that learning / behaviour disabilities make a child more likely to be accused of spirit possession.

#### **File audits**

11. The four specific areas of child abuse (female genital mutilation, honour based violence, abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession and child trafficking and exploitation) are more common in London than expected. Local authorities do not currently collect specific prevalence data for these cases, and consideration needs to be given to doing so.
12. Although there is evidence that the child protection threshold exercised by statutory services is appropriate, there remains a need to promote consistent good practice.
13. There is a need for earlier multi-agency intervention in cases where this type of abuse is suspected.
14. Professionals in statutory services face challenges in identifying and responding to the four specific areas of child abuse, and need more training and access to expert advice.
15. The project has shown that partnership working between London boroughs is both essential and achievable, and London would benefit from a co-ordinated, centralised approach to information gathering and sharing.
16. Improvement is needed in systems for professionals in statutory services to access information from abroad.

## Project recommendations

The project recommendations are that:

1. The London Safeguarding Children Board (the London Board) seeks funding, on behalf of the London Local Safeguarding children Boards (LSCBs), from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), Department of Health and the Home Office, to continue to support the work undertaken in the Community Partnership Project, and particularly the intensive personal contact that this requires.
2. London LSCBs dedicate part of their annual plan to the development of communities' and faith groups' awareness of all aspects of safeguarding children, with particular attention to the needs of Black and minority ethnic communities and minority faith groups.
3. The London Board and London LSCBs start to collect data in a consistent fashion around the four specific areas of child abuse (female genital mutilation, honour based violence, abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession and child trafficking and exploitation).
4. The London Board and London LSCBs consider including domestic violence information in the dataset outlined in point 3 above, since this was raised as an issue by the communities, is very prevalent in the general population and is closely linked to honour based violence.
5. The London Board should make the tools and resources developed during the project available to all London LSCBs through its website ([www.londonscb.gov.uk](http://www.londonscb.gov.uk)). This will need to be maintained and regularly updated by the London Board, in conjunction with key staff involved in this work with communities in London.
6. The London Board should continue to provide a co-ordination function for the London LSCBs' work with local communities and faith groups.
7. The London Board should ensure that safeguarding children practice in response to the four specific areas of child abuse is supported by up-to-date procedures and practice guidance.
8. The London Board should seek better links for London statutory services with the Borders and Immigration Service to support safeguarding children activity.
9. The London Board should represent to the Crown Prosecution Service the need for there to be more prosecutors in London with specialist knowledge in relation to children and the four specific areas of child abuse.
10. The London Board should support London LSCBs in addressing the safeguarding aspects of young people behaving or at risk of behaving in anti-social ways. This issue was raised by the communities themselves.
11. The London Board should support London agencies to follow through investigations to ensure that, when there has been an allegation of potential or actual harm to a child in a community or faith group, that the group remains a safe place for children.
12. The London Board and London LSCBs should support schools to promote awareness of the four specific areas of child abuse and safeguarding of children in general, particularly to local Black and minority ethnic communities and minority faith groups.
13. The London Board should approach central government for support to improve communication between UK policing and local authority services and welfare and governmental organisations abroad.

## 1. Introduction

The Community Partnership Project was a London Safeguarding Children Board (the London Board) action and audit project, jointly managed with eight London boroughs and funded by the London Board, the Department for Education and Skills, the Home Office and the participating London boroughs. The project commenced on 1st July 2006 and ended on 30th June 2007.

The aim of the project was to improve partnership working between statutory bodies and local minority ethnic communities and faith groups for the safeguarding of London's children, by gathering and sharing information and promoting improvement in practice across London.

The project forms part of the ongoing safeguarding children response by London boroughs, police and health services and central government to the death of Victoria Climbié, and the more recent highly publicised cases of abuse linked to custom and ritual in London.

The London Board and London boroughs recognise and respect the very wide diversity which exists both within and between the cultures of London's communities. The project acknowledges and values the positive position that many London communities and faith groups have taken and continue to take in their willingness to increase their understanding of how best to keep their children safe.

### 1.1 Objectives

The objectives and scope of the project were to:

- Improve the safeguarding of children through collaboration between the statutory services and communities and faith groups in the eight participating boroughs;
- Develop effective practice for safeguarding children, provide education and raise awareness in communities and faith groups, and establish a template for future work;
- Conduct audits, surveys and research to develop an understanding of the experience of families in communities when statutory services have been involved in investigating allegations of abuse;
- Gather both qualitative and quantitative information to establish a reference point to inform the planning, funding and commissioning of future safeguarding services;
- Address and gather information about four specific areas of child abuse: female genital mutilation, honour based violence, abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession and child trafficking and exploitation.

### 1.2 Structure

The Community Partnership Project was structured with a view to achieving local action, and the participating London boroughs each recruited or seconded an appropriate member of staff as a community partnership adviser to help achieve the project outcomes in their area. The community partnership advisers were trained, supervised and supported by the boroughs, working together with the project co-ordinator.

During the course of the London Board project, the community partnership advisers met with the project co-ordinator on a monthly basis. The community partnership advisers also met together regularly as a peer support group, and have shared information and resources and undertaken a large number of tasks collaboratively, both through these meetings and as part of their day-to-day project activity.

The participating London boroughs were Brent, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Newham and Southwark.

### 1.3 Methodology

The project comprised of two distinct methodologies: action and audit.

#### Community activity

The action methods relate particularly to the borough community partnership advisers (CPAs - see section 3.1 Community partnership advisers), who were to:

- Identify and engage with local communities and faith groups in the eight London boroughs, with a focus on custom and ritual;
- Measure the perceptions and experiences of the communities, and offer education and links to statutory services for information around safeguarding children;
- Work with statutory agencies and local communities to increase their knowledge and awareness of the four specific areas of child abuse, and to gather information about these areas of abuse;
- Seek to develop effective (and lasting) communication between statutory services and the minority ethnic communities and faith groups.

#### File audits

File audits were conducted to establish the current response from statutory agencies in cases where one (or more) of the four specific areas of child abuse was suspected, aiming to identify existing good practice and potential areas for improvement (see section 4. Project file audits). The planned method for conducting file audits was to:

- Access local authority and police records for cases where one (or more) of the four specific areas of abuse was suspected, to compare thresholds for intervention in different boroughs and for different communities;
- Undertake a retrospective review of cases relating to custom and ritual by conducting in-depth interviews with families and children where allegations of abuse had been investigated;
- Use the information from the interviews to identify any factors that make some children more vulnerable to being harmed than others, and increase the likelihood of custom and ritual translating in some families into child abuse.

## 2. Context of the project

### 2.1 National policy context

The Community Partnership Project took place in the general context of considerable national policy change. Following the *Report of the Inquiry into the Death of Victoria Climbié*, written by Lord Laming in 2003, the Government produced its *Every Child Matters* policy initiative. This has required the greater integration of children's services and focused on the value of early intervention as a means of avoiding social exclusion and harm to children. Each local authority was required to appoint a Director of Children's Services and a Lead Member responsible and accountable for children's services within that local authority area.

Part of the *Every Child Matters* initiative also sought to extend the understanding of the nature of safeguarding children. Local Safeguarding Children Boards were established to

promote safeguarding of all children in the local area, not only those with whom professional agencies might have contact. Within this context, the London Community Partnership Project can be seen as a key initiative in seeking to extend awareness of safeguarding issues to communities who might be least likely to have contact with professional agencies, other than in an occasional crisis.

## **2.2 Practice context**

Prior to the commissioning of this project, London agencies had been aware of a number of high profile cases (often accompanied with a high level of media interest) reaching criminal trial or referral to child protection agencies, especially around the issue of abuse where a parent or carer believed the child to be possessed by evil spirits. Interest and awareness of this particular issue was also raised following the death of Victoria Climbié in 2000, when it emerged at public inquiry that Victoria had been taken to a pastor as a result of her carer's belief that she was possessed. There had also been a high profile case involving similar concerns and resulting in successful prosecutions immediately prior to the commencement of this project, prompting the DfES to commission and publish an independent small-scale research study around the nature and prevalence of this form of child abuse (largely focused on London). This report was published in June 2006 (Eleanor Stobart, *Child Abuse Linked to Accusations of Possession and Witchcraft*, DfES, 2006).

The other three areas were also subject of increased awareness amongst professionals and lobbying by child care professionals. Female genital mutilation had been made illegal in Britain by the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act 1985 and had recently been strengthened and amended by the *Female Genital Mutilation Act (2003)*. In particular, the 2003 Act prohibits UK nationals or permanent UK residents from carrying out FGM abroad or arranging / commissioning female genital mutilation abroad, even in countries where the practice is legal.

Child trafficking and exploitation had been subject of increasing concern, with a number of studies identifying a growth of movement of children and adults across the world. In response to this, the Metropolitan Police Service and London authorities had undertaken a project known as Operation Paladin, whereby unaccompanied children arriving at Heathrow Airport had their details taken and passed to LA children's social care to ensure their safety and well-being. Other organisations such as *ECPAT UK* (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes) have lobbied strongly around the need to raise professional and political awareness of the plight of young people trafficked into the UK for the purpose of profit and exploitation, sometimes in domestic servitude or sexual exploitation.

Honour based violence had also been a source of some concern both for the police and some London Local Safeguarding Children Boards, who had been made aware of the dangers to young people of violence from family members because of acts which were perceived to bring dishonour on family or culture. These cases had particularly focused on the question of girls' rights to engage in relationships with young men or boys without family approval, and the use or threats of violence towards boys whose behaviour was seen to bring dishonour to a family.

## **2.3 London context**

### **Diversity**

London is the most ethnically diverse city in the UK, with 40.2 per cent of Londoners belonging to a minority ethnic group. At the time of the 2001 census, two fifths of young Londoners under 18 were from a Black or minority ethnic group, rising to 52 per cent in inner London, compared to just 13 per cent of children in England and Wales. London's school

children speak more than 300 languages between them, and 33.5 per cent of secondary school children speak English as a second language. In primary schools the figure is 39.1 per cent, rising to a staggering 52.3 per cent in inner London. This compares to national averages of 12.5 per cent and 9.5 per cent respectively. Failure to engage effectively with minority ethnic groups, particularly those for whom English is a second language, is a common issue to emerge from serious case reviews across the UK, and high levels of cultural diversity make this a particularly crucial area of work for safeguarding children professionals in London.

However, it can be extremely difficult to get up to date information about the diverse communities living in London, particularly at a local level, with a large proportion of the more reliable data coming from the now outdated 2001 census. This fails to take into account the high levels of movement across borough boundaries (a particularly common feature of life in London), and information on any migration since 2001 can be sketchy at best. The accession of new countries into the European Union in 2004, for example, has brought new communities with their own views on child safeguarding into the UK. Statutory agencies must therefore decide how best to ensure that these groups are helped to understand the more formal systems that operate in the UK, while taking the time to consider how the communities themselves operate and how their culture and perceptions of the state may influence their activities. The work of the community partnership advisers (see section 3.1 Community partnership advisers) has certainly assisted their boroughs in this respect, and time may show the cost effectiveness of this community link in terms of raising safeguarding awareness and therefore reducing the role of LA children's social care agencies.

### **London Child Protection Procedures and national guidance**

The London Board has also ensured that the *London Child Protection Procedures, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (2007)* (the London Procedures) includes sections on female genital mutilation, honour based violence (and the related concerns of forced marriage of a child and domestic violence), abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession and trafficked and exploited children. There are also sections on working with interpreters, accessing information from abroad and working with socially excluded / isolated children and families.

The London Board has produced supplementary procedures (summarised in the London Procedures), providing more detailed guidance for professionals: *Safeguarding Trafficked and Exploited Children (London Board, 2006)* and *Safeguarding Children at Risk of Abuse through Female Genital Mutilation (London Board, 2007)*. *Safeguarding Children at Risk of Abuse from Domestic Violence* is due in early 2008.

In addition, the Government has produced practice guidance on *Safeguarding Children from Abuse Linked to a Belief in Spirit Possession (DfES, 2007)*, and *Safeguarding Children who may have been Trafficked* is due in early 2008.

### **Metropolitan Police Projects Violet and Azure**

*Project Violet* was initiated in 2005 by the Metropolitan Police Child Abuse Investigation Command as a response to public and community concerns regarding child abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession. Project Violet has developed expertise in this area and provides guidance within the Metropolitan Police and externally on investigations linked to this matter.

*Project Azure* is a multi-disciplinary preventative campaign, which aims to eradicate female genital mutilation through education / awareness raising and by developing intelligence pathways and protocols to maximise prosecution opportunities under the currently untested legislation.

Both of these projects are run by a small department, the Partnership Team, within the Child Abuse Investigation Command of the Metropolitan Police.

## **Metropolitan Police community partnership project**

In London, there had been a smaller scale attempt to seek to understand and prevent some of these forms of child abuse through an earlier project commissioned solely by the Metropolitan Police. Through this project, the police service commissioned two independent professionals to meet with community groups and representatives to talk about child safeguarding issues. The project had concluded that there was scope for a high level of concern about possible prevalence (although little certainty) and considerable scope for work to develop relationships and partnerships with community members as a key to safeguarding children and promoting their welfare.

## **London Local Safeguarding Children Boards**

There has been significant interest from London Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) who did not participate in the Community Partnership Project, the majority of which are already undertaking work with their local communities and faith groups and facing the challenges encountered within the project, but without the dedicated resource of a community partnership adviser to address them. This activity is further detailed in section 6 and appendix 1.

## **3. Community activity**

### **3.1 Community partnership advisers (CPAs)**

The project's aims for the CPAs' work was to:

- Encourage closer collaboration between statutory agencies and local communities through the gathering and sharing of information;
- Promote improved safeguarding children practice between the statutory agencies and local minority ethnic communities and faith groups in the eight boroughs, working on the premise that statutory services, community / faith groups and local communities can work together and use their influence to stop abusive practices;
- Identify barriers that discourage communities from sharing information and referring concerns in order to protect children;
- Bridge any gaps in communication that may exist between statutory services and the communities they serve;
- Ensure that London's diverse communities know how to get professional help and advice;
- Gather information on parenting styles and the impact of these on children amongst the more recently settled community groups;
- Raise awareness amongst professionals, communities and faith groups about safeguarding children, both in general and particularly in relation to the four specific areas of abuse;
- Gather and share information on the four specific areas of child abuse.

### **Approach**

The local authorities involved in the project took different approaches towards the employment of CPAs:

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- Secondment of existing staff 2
- Permanent appointment of external staff 1
- 12-month appointment of external staff 3
- 12-month appointment by a voluntary sector overview body 1

Four of the CPAs were experienced qualified social workers, whose experience included working in LA children's social care child protection and looked after children services, LA education welfare and in the probation service. The others had qualifications in law and human rights and experience of working in the community and voluntary sector.

The CPAs were drawn from a range of ethnic backgrounds, including White UK, Black African and Black Caribbean. The local authorities did not generally view this as a key criteria when making the appointments; it was felt that the key requirements were sound knowledge of UK child protection legislation and statutory systems and excellent communication and networking skills. This approach was endorsed by the project outcomes.

The project had a very short lead time, and this contributed to difficulties in the CPAs taking up their posts. Of the eight local authorities involved, only two had employed a CPA at the commencement of the project in July 2006 - this had been achieved through the secondment of existing staff members to the new post for the twelve month duration of the project. The other authorities made appointments during the life of the project, with existing staff members acting into the post until they were able to appoint a CPA.

One local authority was unable to appoint a CPA at all - however, work was nevertheless progressed with the support of an NSPCC pilot *Safe Communities* initiative in the borough (see section 3.2. Partnership with communities, *Safe Communities Project*).

Another authority was also unable to appoint a CPA, but supported the project through the efforts of the LSCB development officer, who brought together the activities of a number of neighbourhood redevelopment projects and services. In fact, the efforts of this officer demonstrated that a different model of engagement could exist, with other services brought together to highlight and prioritise the issue of child safeguarding during projects already underway with minority ethnic communities and faith groups.

A combination of factors facilitated the earlier appointment of a CPA in some boroughs, including a commitment to the time and expense needed to advertise the post as widely as possible, the ability to invest in the salary over and above the amounts agreed within the project and, perhaps most importantly, good fortune in attracting the right candidate.

The skills and experience required for the CPA post represented a unique combination, including:

- A sound knowledge of UK child protection legislation and practice;
- A respectful and politically sensitive approach;
- Persistence;
- The ability to work across the statutory services and local minority ethnic communities and faith groups;
- The ability to network effectively, and to facilitate focus groups, workshops and training sessions.

This presented a challenge to the local authorities, there being a discrepancy between the salaries offered within the project's funding arrangements and the quality of applicant needed to fulfill the CPA's remit.

### **Practice example**

The day to day management of the CPA is the responsibility of a group manager in the children in need service. This is currently under review, as moving the management responsibility to the safeguarding manager seems more appropriate.

To ensure links are made and maintained with other parts of the authority, and for the purposes of strategic overview, the work of the CPA is guided by the community partnership subgroup. Membership of this group comes from children's services (Chair), education, health, commissioning and the police. Consideration is being given to include a representative from the voluntary sector, although who this might be and what form the representation might take are not yet decided.

In five of the boroughs, the CPA was line-managed and supervised by a senior children's services manager, who was also a member of the project's operational board. In one of the boroughs, the CPA was employed by the local voluntary action collaborative. This arrangement was successful partly because the voluntary sector manager was very closely involved with the LSCB. This manager also sat on the operational board, which met bi-monthly with the London Board and the Metropolitan Police throughout the duration of the project.

Each CPA was supported locally by a sub-group of their LSCB or through a local steering group set up for the duration of the project. These arrangements provided some assistance to CPAs in forging links with voluntary agencies working in their area, which was essential in ensuring that the project's aims were not solely reliant on each individual CPA.

## **3.2 Partnership with the communities**

The CPAs sought to engage minority ethnic communities and faith groups through offers of flexible support around general safeguarding children responsibilities, rather than focusing on the four areas of specific concern to the project, as it was felt this would be less likely to generate a defensive or hostile response. By approaching the general issue of safeguarding children, CPAs were frequently able to make contact with faith communities and individuals who were also keen that their community / group was aware of the need to keep children safe.

### **Practice example**

Having spoken on three occasions by telephone and exchanged e-mail correspondence with a pastor, the CPA arranged to meet at 7pm on Sunday evening, which was the time the pastor held meetings with other senior figures in his church. The CPA was not met on this occasion, and was left alone in a car park. However, through a combination of persistence and understanding that times of meetings of small faith groups are highly flexible and mobile, the CPA eventually did meet with the pastor, and was able to demonstrate that the LSCB could meet the needs of the group for training and guidance around safeguarding children at whatever time was needed. This highlights the importance of flexibility when building trust with faith groups and the benefits of having a dedicated CPA to commit the time and understanding required.

Each CPA had a slightly different priority focus agreed by their LSCB, in line with the different demographics of the borough concerned. However, there were also minority ethnic communities and faith groups who were operating across borough boundaries, providing opportunities for joint working between the CPAs. CPAs met with a large number of community and faith groups and, as the project developed, were also able to meet with faith

community leaders and congregation members who had not previously engaged with statutory children's services.

The boroughs were often able to enhance existing provision by integrating the work of their CPA. For example, where the LSCB offered an extensive programme of training to professionals and other people working with children in the borough, the CPA offered specific training in relation to female genital mutilation, honour based violence, abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession and child trafficking and exploitation. In addition, the unique position of the CPAs allowed them to be flexible when offering training, and courses could be held at times that suited the community and faith groups rather than purely during working hours. Statutory and voluntary sector professionals and communities were also able to discuss their particular requirements or concerns with the CPA, enabling training to be tailored to their needs.

The local authorities involved in the project already had a number of forums and services that provided support and training to voluntary community groups and faith groups as well as direct to the public – which included individuals from local communities or faith groups. By actively engaging with these existing forums and services, the CPAs were able to:

- Reach a far wider range of groups and communities;
- Build on work that was already underway (and avoid any duplication); and
- Utilise expertise where it already existed.

Some boroughs prioritised the communities and groups for the CPA to engage with on the basis of there having been previous issues around safeguarding in general or particular cases which caused concern (e.g. communities where there were historical difficulties around child protection investigations in accessing information or speaking with children alone). Other local authorities prioritised those communities with a high growth rate but poorly developed infrastructures.

### **Practice example**

In one borough, the priority communities were initially the Congolese and other African communities, Turkish, Kurdish and other Muslim communities and the Orthodox Jewish community. Once the project got underway, contact was also made with the Rwandan and Caribbean communities.

In another borough, the priority communities and places of worship included independent churches, Mosques / madrasas, Somali, Bengali, Congolese, Angolan, Nigerian and Turkish community groups.

The CPAs needed to approach minority ethnic communities and faith groups in different ways. In some cases, this involved identifying community / faith leaders and meeting with them first, in other cases meeting with support services to identify contacts or requesting voluntary agency contacts to make introductions.

In the latter stages of the project, some of the CPAs were able to make contact with groups of children and young people in the communities they engaged with, which was an important development in enabling the CPAs to impart information to children and, in some cases, to influence their views on certain issues.

### Practice example

In two authorities, group sessions were held by CPAs with young people. In one of these authorities, the focus of discussion was around issues of staying safe in general terms, whilst in the other the focus was on discussing the issue of female genital mutilation with boys, many of whom had sisters at home. In this group, the CPA was able to use video information to show the abusive nature of all forms of female genital mutilation and overcome beliefs that so-called Type 1 circumcision was not abusive. At the end of the session, the boys all commented that they would speak to their mothers about these practices and to others at school.

### Practice example

The CPA successfully secured Local Area Agreement funding for the Somali and Black and Minority Ethnic Youth to run the 'Let us talk about it!' project. This aimed to reach Somali young men and women through an open discussion / focus group session on female genital mutilation. The project recruited two young people as part-time outreach workers with the purpose of engaging their peers into the debate and formulating recommendations for any future work. Two separate sessions were held – one targeted at young men and the other at girls – and a final mixed session was held to conclude the debate. The young male outreach worker later presented the project to the London Board's female genital mutilation conference in June (see [http://www.londonscb.gov.uk/fgm\\_resources/female\\_genital\\_mutilation\\_conference.html](http://www.londonscb.gov.uk/fgm_resources/female_genital_mutilation_conference.html)).

There were a number of examples of CPAs making contact with communities whose faith and other groups had little prior experience of contact with statutory children's services. These included CPA contact with a Somali women's group in one London area, and with the Congolese community groups across many of the boroughs concerned.

### Practice example

CPAs had a number of meetings with faith leaders from the Congolese community, who were concerned to counter accusations that had featured in the national media around the abuse of children linked to beliefs in spirit possession, and were already in contact with other advisers to assist them in their work. Towards the end of this project, the CPAs were invited to attend the launch of child protection procedures for Congolese faith groups, which highlights their contribution to encouraging sustainable ownership of the community's safeguarding children agenda.

### Safe Communities project

One local authority which was unable to appoint a CPA was still able to progress partnership working with local communities and faith groups to safeguard children through a 3 year initiative called *Safe Communities*, led by the NSPCC.

The *Safe Communities* initiative is designed for local community and faith groups which provide organised activities for children (e.g. arts, hobbies, religious teaching, early years care, after-school clubs and youth clubs). It aims to strengthen their ability to safeguard children through the use of a toolkit which provides:

For staff:

- A step-by-step guide – written advice about how to run a safe organisation;
- A DVD - to explain what is meant by abuse and how to stop it;
- Two NSPCC educare programmes – courses with additional information about safeguarding children.

For children:

- Kidscheck – a booklet for children to use to check how safe their club or group is;
- *Worried? Need to talk?* – a pocket-sized guide aimed at 11-17 year-olds, outlining their rights, explaining the subject of abuse and providing information on who to turn to when facing difficulties, and what will happen if they talk to someone.

The local authority also organised a safeguarding children conference for the local community and a series of workshops, including training for local community and faith group trainers to develop their confidence and competence in delivering child protection training.

### Practice example

A typical *Safe Communities* workshop aimed to equip participants to:

- Define what is meant by safeguarding children and young people in line with Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures;
- Judge how to use the toolkit within their community / faith group;
- Identify the core responsibilities of being a named person for people to turn to if they are concerned about the wellbeing of a child;
- Name who they need to contact to ensure everyone works together to safeguard children and young people;

Also to know:

- Who does what in the local authority in relation to safeguarding children; and
- The process for dealing with concerns.

### 3.3 Particular challenges in relation to faith groups

The role of the CPAs was particularly necessary, and most effective, in engaging with faith groups. The CPAs sometimes needed to expend considerable personal energy to forge links with faith leaders, and contact was frequently only established after several attempts to meet. This was despite a wide range of written information having been sent to these groups at the outset of the project, and telephone contact having been established at an early stage.

### Practice example

Community groups were not always willing to engage with the CPAs. In one borough, letters were initially sent to 40-50 faith groups, yielding little or no response (with some correspondence returned marked “place of worship no longer exists”). This approach is no longer used unless a personal contact has been made, and the CPAs are keen to stress the value of interfaith forums as initial points of contact.

When planning engagement with faith groups, it was important to give consideration to a number of factors:

- Many of the groups move easily and frequently across borough boundaries;
- Some communities / faith groups whose practices may be of concern are very difficult to keep track of;
- Equally, the group leader may not have offices and use only a mobile number for contact;
- Hierarchical structures can make it difficult to engage with the key figures until a large degree of trust has been established lower down;
- Key figures may not be available at meeting venues until the time of the service, and these services can take place in the early hours of the morning;
- Careful planning is necessary to work around various religious holidays (this put pressure on the CPAs in view of the short timescale for the project);
- There is currently no regulation of faith groups and no hard intelligence about their activities and leadership;
- Some groups are suspicious of the local authority and its motives for the project;
- Some groups may deny that safeguarding children issues affect their community, and take offence if they are raised in conversation;
- The approach to safeguarding children in the group's country of origin may be very different to that adopted in the UK, leaving no reference point for this type of work;
- Groups do not always vet volunteers or include them in training;
- The political climate of terrorism and high profile cases of abuse linked to cultural beliefs or practices meant that some groups were extremely reluctant to engage with statutory services.

### Practice example

The links made with the Congolese Pastorship, including the identification of the group's training needs and providing assistance with organising a conference in July 2007, is further evidence of the achievement of this project. Monthly meetings have taken place with the pastorship, who have also acted as a point of reference to find out about churches where there have been concerns about safeguarding practices.

## 3.4 Partnership with statutory services

### Working with communities

The CPAs engaged with local statutory agencies such as community safety teams, local housing associations, drug action teams, travellers' teams, vulnerable pupils' teams and supplementary schools advisors to provide training in order to break down barriers and encourage minority ethnic communities and faith groups to access services.

### Informing statutory service practice

The CPAs' work with statutory services centred on raising professional awareness and understanding of the four specific areas of child abuse, including through the development of policy and practice within the local authority. Social workers do not always identify these

issues separately when undertaking assessments, which can mean they go undetected until the case has been open for some time. The awareness raising was aimed primarily at enabling professionals to understand the nature of harm to children, and to identify risk of harm at an earlier stage.

#### **Practice example**

Through making links with minority ethnic communities and faith groups, the project has been a useful point of reference for the police and social workers wanting to either establish contact and consult with specific religious / community leaders or to find out more about a community, culture or service.

One of the local authorities made significant progress in this by arranging for the CPA to be invited to all strategy or other discussions and meetings where one of the four principal subject areas was a matter of concern to LA children's social care and the police. This approach enabled the CPA to provide information about specific communities, ensure that professionals did not confuse abuse with cultural norms and placed the four subject areas at the heart of child protection practice for investigating agencies. This approach was a very clear means of ensuring that the work of the CPA resulted in a direct contribution to the safeguarding of children in the short- as well as the long-term

Where the CPAs provided training for statutory service professionals, they were able to tailor the courses to include not just the trainee's needs, but also the information the CPAs had received directly from community and faith leaders as to how, for example, domestic violence manifested in the community and how best to approach it.

#### **Practice example**

The CPA worked with the LA children's social care Black and minority ethnic adviser , meeting with a variety of departments and services within the local authority, community / voluntary groups and individuals. Priority issues which emerged included:

- Concerns in the mosques about staff behaviour;
- Requests from schools for advice on cultural issues relating to their children;
- Requests from LA children's social care professionals (including on male circumcision);
- Involving the community in preventing female genital mutilation, and improving service provision for those who have undergone the procedure;
- The need for information on female genital mutilation and forced marriage to be included in the Local Safeguarding Children Board Community Handbook;
- The need to map and contact the faith communities in the borough.

### **3.5 Types of activity and tools / materials**

The initial stage of the Community Partnership Project involved the CPAs:

- Mapping the minority ethnic communities and faith groups; and
- Meeting with community / faith leaders, community groups, and relevant statutory and voluntary sector agencies to ascertain the needs of the communities and inform the groups and agencies about the work of the project.

The method used to collect information was focus group and individual discussions around safeguarding children in general and the four specific areas of concern in particular.

The second stage of the project involved building on this initial contact, continuing to meet with relevant groups / agencies and delivering training on safeguarding and child protection.

### **Training**

The provision of free awareness training was a popular offer made by CPAs to communities and faith groups, who were also keen to accept assistance in developing protocols and guidance around addressing child protection issues and ensuring safer recruitment. The provision of advice about Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks for faith organisations where staff and pastors were in direct contact with children and their families was welcomed by most groups, and in some cases local authorities were able to provide these checks on their behalf.

#### **Practice example**

The CPA negotiated for the local authority to carry out Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks for a number of community and faith groups, making it easier for them to ensure their workforce was safe to work with children and helping to develop trust in the local authority and statutory services in general.

The training undertaken has been varied and the boundaries of the project's core focus (on female genital mutilation, honour based violence, abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession and child trafficking and exploitation) have often been extended in line with the requirements of the group or the particular needs of communities. For example, supplementary schools requested a session on the roles and responsibilities of designated child protection teachers, which led to a request for specific training in identifying and responding to abuse.

The CPAs were also able to arrange for training materials and other information to be translated into community languages, and interpretation services were provided during training sessions. This proved popular even amongst groups with a strong grasp of English, who often prefer to receive this kind of information in their own language. The CPAs also reported that addressing minority ethnic communities in their own language can have a greater impact.

#### **Practice example**

The CPAs were able to attend and participate in training activities arranged by other agencies, such as the Association of Muslim Lawyers, the Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service, AFRUCA and ECPAT. These sessions included:

- Safeguarding – An Islamic Perspective;
- Working With Faith to Safeguard African Children;
- Safe in Faith.

### **Leaflets and letters**

Early on, the project developed some useful guidelines for making contact with communities and faith groups, which served as a valuable basis for this form of communication. For example, one local authority took responsibility for developing standard leaflets and letters introducing the project and role of the CPA, which could then be used by all other boroughs when initiating contact with their local communities and faith groups.

## Procedures

Child protection procedures were developed for some faith groups, while others made their existing procedures available for the CPAs and their child protection colleagues to assess and comment on. One authority developed a framework for the production of procedures, although it was agreed that each set of procedures needed to be tailored for the relevant authority - even if using a generic template.

In one authority, the CPA was engaged by the voluntary sector organisation responsible for drawing together voluntary sector bodies across the borough. In partnership with the LSCB, this body was also able to offer child protection training and guidance on procedures to all new voluntary sector groups, who would be required to receive such assistance by the local authority if statutory funding was to be provided. The voluntary sector overview body worked to ensure that procedures covered the question of safe practices and recruitment but were written in a concise and tailor-made form according to the size and nature of activity of the voluntary group concerned.

The development of procedures and protocols was an area which has raised the prospect of long term awareness raising and practice influence with respect to a number of groups. Several groups who were in contact with CPAs were supplementary schools providing religious education to children – often madrasas providing Islamic tuition, normally at weekends and during evenings, or Christian home groups (small groups, often meeting weekly in the home of a group leader). These were important avenues of contact for CPAs as such settings need to be staffed and run in a way consistent with safe recruitment practices and good standards of safe care for children. It is thus important that faith groups are aware that safeguarding children procedures should not be limited to the primary place of worship, but should be applied wherever group activities involve children.

### Practice example

One community partnership adviser undertook a considerable piece of work in engaging with the local Muslim community and mosques to build on contact which had begun before her appointment. This work led to the development with the local community of a protocol for keeping children safe in the borough's mosques, including additional religious schooling provided by madrasas associated with mosques. This protocol will shortly be made available for all LSCBs to develop for their own local purposes, and is likely to be used nationally.

## Information

Community partnership advisers made considerable use of a range of resources and sources of information about female genital mutilation, honour based violence, abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession and child trafficking and exploitation. Some of these materials were developed jointly by CPAs, whilst others were developed by particular authorities or groups (see section 3.6. Joint working).

### Practice example

The CPA:

- Compiled a database of eighty-eight local communities and faith groups;
- Established links with the local Sure Start centre and worked with them to develop tailored training for front line professionals;
- Established a supportive relationship with the borough's community engagement forum.

All the resources and materials developed for and/or used in the Community Partnership Project will be available to download from the London Safeguarding Children Board website ([www.londonscb.gov.uk](http://www.londonscb.gov.uk)), for use by CPAs and others involved in similar work on behalf of LSCBs in London.

### **3.6 Joint working**

In addition to unilateral provision of training, information and guidance for communities and statutory services, the CPAs developed training and materials jointly with relevant agencies and community and faith group leaders and representatives.

#### **Local communities**

Examples of joint working with the community include training sessions on spirit possession, set up in one borough by the CPA, the Congolese Action Group and relevant statutory agencies. This involved planning the content and format of the training sessions together, with a view to equipping the Congolese Action Group to reach out to a wider audience within the local communities. For phase two of the scheme, a local Congolese pastor submitted a bid to the City Parochial Foundation for funding to employ bi-lingual outreach workers from the Congolese, Sudanese (Southern) and Somali communities.

Other examples of initiatives jointly developed with the local communities and faith groups include the Sudan's Women Group, which worked with the CPA in one borough to develop training on child abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession and child trafficking and exploitation. The group also worked with the CPA to offer training and advice for the community on dealing with the widening misunderstanding between parents and teenagers.

In one borough, the CPA worked with supplementary schools run by the Bangladeshi, Somali, Roma, Kosovan, Ethiopian and Southern Sudan communities to provide training on all four areas of particular concern.

In an example of joint work on an individual case, a group Bangladeshi women approached the CPA following a workshop on child protection, asking for support on behalf of a Bangladeshi grandmother who was finding it extremely difficult to cope with caring for her three grandchildren. Her daughter-in-law had mental health difficulties and, although there was social work involvement, the grandmother had never been interviewed. The grandmother was subsequently invited to attend the next session, after which she discussed her worries about the children and the family situation with the CPA. With her consent, the CPA liaised with LA children's social care, who agreed to meet the grandmother at her grandchildren's school to gain further information and consider how the family could be supported. Following this intervention, the school reports that the children are now doing well and that their care seems to have improved.

#### **Practice example**

One local authority held a conference to recognise the joint work that had been done as part of the project and to consolidate links with the community and faith groups which the CPA had been working with. Over 120 people attended, representing services and community groups from across the borough.

#### **Metropolitan Police**

The CPAs had access to the resources of the Metropolitan Police Service Projects Violet and Azure (see section 2.3 London context, Metropolitan Police Projects Violet and Azure), and

they also received support from their local borough policing units (allowing, for example, information exchange between community safety team faith officers and the CPAs).

The CPAs also received support and advice from the Metropolitan Police Paladin Team (see section 2.2. Practice context). This is an integrated team of Police and Immigration Officers specialising in safeguarding children through proactive and preventative initiatives against the trafficking of children throughout London.

### **Participating London boroughs**

Partnership working between the eight participating boroughs has proven to be an essential element to the success of this project, and particularly to the work of the CPAs.

#### **Practice example**

Collaborative working between the boroughs proved useful in individual cases where there were concerns with a place of worship in one borough but the family resided in a neighbouring borough.

Much of the work undertaken with community and faith groups was done collaboratively so that the resource of one borough would assist that in another borough, and vice versa. The degree of joint working and sharing of guidance, leaflets, and training materials was an impressive feature of this project.

#### **Practice example**

Contact was established with Congolese faith leaders by three of the CPAs. Each was able to offer training packages to church members, which were delivered jointly across borough boundaries and gave clear information about the group's responsibilities to children and the expectations and primary concerns of statutory authorities. This led to further meetings and dialogue with Congolese community organisations throughout the project, with a specific focus on developing awareness of safeguarding children issues and the need to protect children from beliefs in spirit possession in particular.

### **Voluntary sector agencies and out of London councils**

In several of the participating boroughs, the CPAs made contact with existing voluntary agencies and groups offering support to families in their local communities. For example, one CPA was able to publish an article about the work of the Community Partnership Project in a voluntary agency's newsletter, which reaches 260 faith groups and also the street pastors in the local area.

Other examples of support from existing voluntary agency projects included the CPA being able to use the NSPCC's videos to promote understanding of safeguarding children in Somali and Bangladeshi communities, and information provided by ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes) in relation to child trafficking or FORWARD in relation to female genital mutilation.

Considerable contact was also had with the Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service, which has developed links with a number of minority faith communities across London.

When working with madrasas, the CPAs were also able to call on the experience of Kirklees Council, whose work on promoting child protection in this area has received national recognition.

### 3.7 CPAs' achievements

The CPAs have been successful in meeting the objectives of the Community Partnership Project (see section 1.1. Objectives), and the participating boroughs have benefited from:

- The establishment of contact with a range of previously isolated communities and faith groups, allowing statutory agencies to begin developing long-term relationships with a specific focus on safeguarding children;
- The establishment of greater trust between parents and families in local communities and the statutory services;
- The provision of key safeguarding children training to local communities and faith groups, resulting in greater awareness of child protection, UK law, and what is deemed to be abusive and harmful to children;
- Community and faith groups developing procedures and protocols to keep children safe, often with input from the CPAs and statutory services;
- A stronger knowledge base on the four specific areas of child abuse, and the development of links with bodies able to provide further support and guidance;
- Greater awareness of the prevalence, profile and alerting factors for female genital mutilation, honour based violence, abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession and child trafficking and exploitation. This has been reflected in an increase in cases referred to LA children's social care;
- Greater awareness of a number of other issues amongst these communities, particularly around private fostering.

The activities of the CPAs has enabled the LSCBs in the participating boroughs to develop a longer-term strategy for community engagement in relation to children's safeguarding issues, which particularly includes the needs of children and their families from minority ethnic communities and faith groups. Various participating boroughs have since reported a range ongoing activity, including:

- A multi-disciplinary meeting on child trafficking (with guidance from ECPAT) is now held every 6-8 weeks. As a result of this meeting, the LA education department has improved their links with the hospital A&E department, and now follows up on any children who present at the hospital without a school place. The creation of safer structures and systems to support any vulnerable children, (in this case, particularly those who may have been trafficked) is a key example of the ongoing work taking place across London.
- Training on female genital mutilation and forced marriage is now being offered in girls' schools where there are a number of girls who may be at risk. There was a good attendance by education professionals, and the CPA has maintained contact with these staff.
- Local communities and faith groups have welcomed the opportunity to have further dialogue with statutory agencies, and there is ongoing work across the participating boroughs to consider how the two sectors can work together.
- A large number of local communities and faith organisations have taken advice around child protection policies and the importance of CRB checks seriously, and continue to work with the local authority to ensure they are safeguarding their children effectively. One example of the ongoing work in this area includes several mosques and madrasas requesting support in developing child protection policies specifically for their community. The local authority's Criminal Records Bureau officer has agreed to process CRB applications on their behalf, and visited the mosque to encourage people to engage with the process.

### **Practice example**

The CPA has managed to overcome many of the barriers that previously limited successful engagement with local communities and faith groups, such as the poor image of LA children's social care, and many training sessions have now been delivered to groups that would otherwise not have been reached. Additionally, a child protection policy has been drafted for the mosques, and there are plans to produce a CD for training community groups on female genital mutilation (once funding is agreed).

Through the activity of the CPAs, each of the participating boroughs has:

- Been able to identify and target priority local communities and faith groups for support around safeguarding children issues, beginning the process of building long-term relationships;
- Been assured that local communities and faith groups are keen to work more closely with statutory services to safeguard children;
- Raised awareness of the four priority areas (female genital mutilation, honour based violence, abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession and child trafficking and exploitation) among local communities and faith groups, and also within the statutory agencies;
- Gained an insight into the range of parenting and safeguarding children issues which concern local communities and groups (see section 3.8. Findings from the community activity, Information exchanged).

### **3.8 Findings from the community activity**

The findings from the action part of the project are split into:

- a) The methods which the CPAs found most effective when engaging and developing relationships with local communities and faith groups; and
- b) The information exchanged between the CPAs and the local communities, faith groups, voluntary agencies and statutory services they engaged with.

#### **Effective methods of engagement**

##### *Flexibility and personal contact*

- Persistence and personal contact with the local communities, faith groups and other agencies, particularly when developing relationships with smaller groups such as street pastorships and community groups based within homes and even internet cafes.
- Flexibility in times and venues when meeting with community or faith groups. There was a very positive response when the statutory agencies went out to the community rather than expecting groups, with limited time and budgets, to come to them.
- Responding to the needs of local communities and faith groups, and remaining adaptable. Developing relationships at the community or faith group's pace is a cornerstone in developing trust, and it is important to avoid imposing an external agenda too early in the relationship. It is also a prerequisite for the communities and faith groups to own and act on the safeguarding children agenda themselves.
- Understanding politics within and between community groups in order to work well with them. In these situations, a collective approach was not possible.

### *Joint working*

- Cross-borough working and utilising existing knowledge. The size of the task in each authority is such that a CPA can only work through the use of forums already in existence, and the relatively isolated position of a CPA – as a link person between agencies / groups – meant that they worked best when acting jointly with other CPAs and with good support from the local authority. Local authorities also found they addressed the needs of some faith groups best by working together, since the churches are often linked across borough boundaries.
- Developing and sharing tailored resources, including DVDs, information leaflets, sessional training materials, posters, and procedures.
- Sharing activities with other groups who already have working relationships (e.g. the Black and minority ethnic forums).
- Sharing training events and facilities. Particular successes were achieved at large training events (e.g. with the Methodist church community), and supplementary schools training on the responsibilities and duties of being a designated child protection teacher.
- Joint training with local voluntary agencies (e.g. on female genital mutilation to designated teachers in state schools, in recognition that there might be specific risks prior to the summer holidays).
- Joint working with the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service and the police projects Violet and Azure, plus information sharing meetings with other boroughs and increased partnership work between the authority's statutory agencies.
- Having a wide range of experience and qualifications to draw upon. There was no expectation that CPAs should come from a particular background, and the range of backgrounds (both ethnic and otherwise), previous experiences and qualifications has been extremely valuable to the project and particularly useful during joint training events:
  - Where a CPA was of a similar or same ethnic background to a local community, this provided easier access in most cases. However, it could prove a possible barrier for fear in the community about confidentiality;
  - The background of the CPA and their positioning (e.g. within LA children's social care or in the voluntary sector) greatly influenced the focus of the work. Thus, a CPA who was a qualified social worker and was positioned in LA children's social care was able to have complete access to the social work files. This gave the CPA a good understanding of the type and number of cases that have come to the notice of the local authority. On the other hand, where a CPA came from the local community and was positioned in the voluntary sector, this assisted in the development of the community's trust and co-operation.
- Working with schools. The very good outcomes achieved by the CPAs working with young people in two of the boroughs indicates that working with head teachers and in schools would have a significant impact on the safeguarding of children in local communities.

### *Preparation and commitment*

- Having a set budget for activities – the ability to provide free training has had a

great impact on take up by groups who have little or no income for this type of event.

- Mainstreaming community engagement work. In order for local authorities to most effectively benefit from having a CPA with growing expertise in working with communities and faith groups, arrangements should be made for their work to be part of mainstream children's services activity. For example, one of the CPAs was given a specific advisory role in case strategy and planning meetings.
- Publishing articles in local newspapers and community newsletters to raise publicity and gain acceptance for their work.
- Allocating sufficient time and resources to community engagement. The very short lead time for the project meant that the boroughs were unable to sufficiently prepare communities and faith groups, making it more difficult for the CPAs to establish initial contact than may otherwise have been the case.

### Information exchanged

*The four specific areas of child abuse: female genital mutilation, honour based violence, abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession and child trafficking and exploitation.*

The information exchange yielded the following:

- There is a need to raise awareness within LA children's social care about female genital mutilation;
- Communities have differing views and awareness of female genital mutilation. For example, FGM type 1 is viewed as acceptable by members of some communities, and there is a widespread lack of awareness about the law;
- Trafficking continues to be an area of concern for professionals working in local authority unaccompanied asylum seeker teams, and community members have little knowledge about what constitutes child trafficking and whether it is taking place;
- Social workers with experience of working with children who have been accused of spirit possession see the need for specialised therapeutic services for the children.

### Practice example

One CPA reported that within the past 11 months there had been:

- Two allegations of trafficking, one of which involved female genital mutilation;
- Five strategy and four review strategy meetings where there has been an allegation of spirit possession, all of which involved independent churches.
- One allegation of forced marriage and one threat of honour based violence.

### Practice example

The CPA is focussing on gathering hard evidence from around the local authority on child trafficking, and will particularly focus on the local hospital's A&E department.

## Child protection

- Whilst some community and faith groups do have child protection policies, the majority do not and require (and often welcome) assistance with devising them;
- Criminal Records Bureau checks are not consistently undertaken by community and faith groups;
- Despite the willingness of many local communities and faith groups to engage with statutory services and take the necessary steps to improve their response to safeguarding children, the manner in which they operate can still leave some children unprotected.

This includes staff recruitment and training, procedures, organisational arrangements, relationships with statutory services, raising community awareness and managing relationships with the community in relation to individual incidents.

## Community-related issues

- Once contacted, many local communities and faith groups are very keen for more (and more in-depth) engagement. Although some groups are less keen to engage, the CPAs have found that personal contact can be a highly effective way to break down these initial barriers.
- Local communities and faith groups are very concerned to protect their children.
- Communities invariably bring their own priority issues:
  - Discipline and issues related to the tensions between the first and second generations of immigrant families (i.e. parents struggling with their children's 'lack of respect' for their mother culture's values and norms; children struggling with 'strict or restrictive' parenting);
  - Poverty, and related issues;
  - Truancy;
  - Substance misuse;
  - Gangs and weapons;
  - Sexual promiscuity, especially for girls and young women;
  - HIV and other blood-borne viruses;
  - Domestic violence.

### Practice example

This project, and particularly the role of the CPA, gave a number of local communities and faith groups a channel for expressing their concerns that had not previously been available to them. This sometimes made it difficult to sustain a focus on the four areas identified by the Community Partnership Project as a priority, as groups were keen to highlight the issues of most importance to them.

- Many of the children and young people engaged through this work were open to discussion and debate around their beliefs and experiences, and are keen to be able to influence their own communities on safeguarding issues;

- Communities and faith groups generally make little use of statutory services and want information on schools, health care (particularly GP registration), immigration, benefits etc;
- Many communities and faith groups are unfamiliar with UK law in relation to child protection and are not clear about the roles and responsibilities of statutory services. Although this issue is not specific to minority communities, their additional isolation from other mainstream services and society exacerbates the situation;
- There is a definite need for positive outreach work to challenge the myths and anxieties about LA children's social care undermining family life and taking children into care. The personal contact provided by the CPAs has proved to be the key to changing this perspective;
- Although making initial contact has sometimes required exhaustive efforts from the CPAs, they have then been able to make a significant difference to some communities relatively easily because their needs are so basic. The primary requirement is for information giving, signposting and referral;
- The project has yielded useful information about the communities, particularly on issues such as:
  - Differences within communities, which can relate to a family belonging to a particular clan or to when the family / community settled in the UK;
  - Differences of perspective between the older / younger, male / female and community members / leadership within communities;
  - The trend that learning / behaviour disabilities make a child more likely to be accused of spirit possession.
- The timing of the project has been questioned by some members of the Islamic faith, especially in light of the current political climate;
- Some community groups feel over consulted and they want action – access to parenting classes; training on issues such as domestic violence, anti-social behaviour, and safeguarding their children; representation in the LA children's social care workforce; information on issues such as education, housing, private fostering, UK law and safeguarding children.
- Almost all the communities and faith groups expressed severe concerns about the short length of the project;
- All the CPAs reported that the time-limited nature of their post complicated the development of relationships with communities and faith groups. Some of these groups felt that there was less value in devoting time, energy and resources to a relationship with statutory services when the latter were intending to withdraw that relationship later on.

### **Statutory services**

- The CPAs reported that the knowledge they acquired about local communities and faith groups was often invaluable to statutory services, who were also keen to tap into the CPAs' expertise around the four specific areas of child abuse.
- The CPAs were also able to share their contacts with statutory services, and in some cases facilitate a relationship between the local authority and local communities and faith groups.

## **4. Project file audits**

### **4.1 Approach**

#### **File audits**

The project co-ordinator and support team reviewed:

- A number of LA children's social care case files, which the participating local authorities had identified as featuring one (or more) of the four specific areas of child abuse. The project developed a file audit tool for this purpose (see appendix 1).
- A number of police files from cases of child abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession in which the Project Violet team had been involved.

#### **Group discussions**

Further to the file audits, the project co-ordinator also held two sessions with multi-agency staff groups of professionals who had direct experience of working with cases involving these issues. These groups were drawn from social work and health professionals across the eight local authorities involved in the project.

### **4.2 Objectives**

The project's objectives for the file audits were to:

- Establish the current response from statutory agencies in cases where one (or more) of the four specific areas of child abuse was suspected, aiming to identify existing good practice and potential areas for improvement (e.g. in relation to recognition of the abuse, thresholds for LA children's social care and police involvement and social care and criminal justice intervention).
- Interview children and families identified from the files, exploring their perceptions of the alleged abusive behaviour and their experience of receiving statutory services.

The project aim was for the file audit information to provide a research based companion to the information and outcomes from the outreach work of the CPAs.

It should be noted that this is a small sample of files, and is therefore presented for illustrative purposes rather than as a comprehensive statistical picture of the profile and prevalence of these cases.

### **4.3 Profile and prevalence**

#### **Breakdown of the issues in the case files**

Four of the participating local authorities were able to provide access to case files, relating to experiences within the previous two years. Each of these authorities provided up to four files. One further authority agreed to review their own files using the project's file audit tool (see appendix 1), and one authority not involved in the project also provided files for review.

The total number of files reviewed, including the police files, was thirty-four.

The prevalence of the four specific areas of child abuse in the case files reviewed was as follows:

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• Child abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession	21
• Female genital mutilation	2
• Honour based violence	2
• Child trafficking and exploitation	10

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35

(One case is counted twice as it related to concerns about spirit possession and child trafficking)

### *Child abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession*

Child abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession was the most prevalent area of concern recorded in the LA children's social care files.

The majority of the police files reviewed dealt with child abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession, because this is Project Violet's focus of work (see section 2.3. London context). The Metropolitan Police's published figures for the period March 2006 to January 2007 recorded thirteen investigations where a belief in spirit possession was believed to have played a role in the motivation of carers or parents.

### *Female genital mutilation*

The low number of files in this category appear to reflect that fact that very few concerns of children being at risk of abuse, or already abused, through female genital mutilation reach the referral desks of LA children's social care or the police in London. The Metropolitan Police's published figures for the period March 2006 to January 2007 recorded only one investigation, of historic female genital mutilation of two girls, which took place in Somalia.

### *Honour based violence*

A low number of honour based violence cases was identified from the LA children's social care files. This was in contrast to a relatively high level of honour related crimes against children in the Metropolitan Police's published figures for honour based violence. The police dealt with twenty-nine allegations of violence against children (under 18s) which were believed to be motivated by perceived shame to family honour in the period March 2006 to January 2007. This raises a question about whether these crimes are not recorded as 'honour based violence' by LA children's social care or are not shared with local authorities.

### *Child trafficking and exploitation*

The social care files recorded a relatively high level of concern about children being trafficked, although this was not reflected in the police records. The Metropolitan Police's published child trafficking figures for the period March 2006 to January 2007 recorded no cases. This is largely due to the fact that the police only record crimes that take place in this country, and the original offence of trafficking (e.g. abduction, fraud / deception) usually takes place before entry into the UK. Trafficking cases will often be hidden under broader categories such as rape or sexual assault.

## **Family ethnicity**

The files show that families suspected of these types of child abuse do not come from any particular ethnic background, with cases in this cohort involving Black African families, Asian families and White UK families. According to file records, the Black African families came from Nigeria, Congo, Somalia, Angola, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Ghana, and the Asian families were Indian, Chinese and Vietnamese.

Cases in which the concerns related to spirit possession were equally likely to involve White-UK families as Black African and Asian families. Similarly, there was no clear bias in terms of family ethnicity in cases in which the concerns related to child trafficking and exploitation.

## Prevalence

LSCBs monitor total referral numbers, and the four areas of concern specific to this project represented a very small proportion of child abuse allegations dealt with by the participating statutory services in general (approx. 95,000 per annum, using 2005-6 figures).<sup>1</sup>

Establishing prevalence of child abuse and neglect requires LSCBs to map need in their local populations using wider sources of information than referral figures. Local authorities do not currently collect prevalence data for child abuse related to female genital mutilation, honour based violence, belief in spirit possession and trafficking and exploitation. Where there was information, the number of cases was very low in each category. One local authority did, however, report an increase in recent years in the number of referrals in which female genital mutilation was a cause for concern.

The most reliable data came from the police service. However, police figures only record reported investigations and not prevalence.

It is already difficult to have an accurate reflection of the nature of child abuse and neglect in families across the UK and therefore understanding prevalence of certain forms of abuse and neglect within communities which are not well engaged with local authorities and other services presents very particular challenges. Nevertheless, this project has shown that the issues are not uncommon in London, especially in respect of concerns about abuse associated with beliefs in spirit possession and child trafficking and exploitation, and there is a case for investing more resources to gain a better idea of prevalence in order to improve statutory services prevention and response to these issues in future.

## 4.4 Practice quality

### Good practice

The files reviewed highlighted a number of examples of good practice, in often extremely complex cases that required workers to demonstrate a significant understanding of the interplay between child abuse and belief systems in a multi-cultural society.

Good practice noted included the following:

- Social workers were supervised regularly by consistent line managers.
- Formal child protection systems involving the use of strategy meetings and child protection conferences generally worked well in providing a robust planning framework to ensure a child's safety. In one borough, the use of a series of reviews and strategy meetings effectively protected a child whose carers believed he was possessed by evil spirits.
- Whenever there was an immediate threat of harm, the child in question was protected by the use of powers available to LA children's social care and police.
- Recording of ethnicity was good, although there were inconsistencies across London boroughs as to how to record cultural and ethnic detail.

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<sup>1</sup> DfES, *Referrals, Assessments, and Children and Young People on child protection registers, England - Year ending 31 March 2006* and DfES, *Referrals, Assessments, and Children and Young People on child protection registers, England - Year ending 31 March 2005*.

- The London Refuge had played a critical role in one case involving a young person running away from honour-related threats of violence, showing a good level of inter-agency working.

### **Casework issues**

The case files also demonstrated a number of areas where best outcomes were not always achieved, examples of which are outlined below:

#### *Treatment services*

A number of cases suggested an absence of available mental health treatments for young people who had experienced abuse through beliefs in spirit possession. The children / young people in these cases continued to believe that they were possessed despite the efforts of social workers to either seek appropriate treatment resources or refer to standard CAMHS provision. The files reviewed suggested that CAMHS professionals had limited understanding of the complex issues involved. Whilst this may reflect the fact that the project did not study CAMHS files, the amount of time spent seeking suitable services implied that social workers did not have a great level of confidence in available treatments for this group of young people.

Several files recorded the views of young people some years after their initial receipt of services in relation to concerns that they were the focus of beliefs that they were possessed by spirits. The young people said that they had gone on to self-harm by cutting or similar and one said she had tried drinking bleach on two occasions as suicide efforts.

#### **Case example**

A boy who had been whipped as a result of his carer's belief that he was possessed and that evil spirits needed to be driven from his body suffered psychologically for some time. Further to concerns about a wish to harm himself, he was eventually compulsorily detained in a psychiatric hospital at the age of 13 years old under section 4 of the Mental Health Act 1983, only to be discharged two days later with no diagnosis of psychotic illness at all, leaving LA children's social care to continue to attempt to support him further.

The need for effective services to deal with the emotional and psychological needs of these children is even greater when considering that some assessments kept the child in the family home, with agencies agreeing that the emotional harm caused by such belief systems were likely to be less than the harm done by removing the child from home and breaking the links with birth parents.

#### **Case example**

Three children aged between 8 and 11 years of age were removed into care by the police following concerns about a very dilapidated household, which was decorated throughout with messages about Christ as the parents believed they were under threat from evil spirits. The family's desire to escape these evil spirits also led to frequent moves and a failure to engage effectively with schools for their children. However, the police investigation file concluded that, whilst these children might still be subject to practices which were not in their best interests, it had been agreed with the local authority that the strength and commitment of the children to their parents was such that it was right for them to return home.

The need for an appropriate response and effective treatment services for children abused through beliefs linked to spirit possession also relates to placements for children in care. In one case, a child who was abused by his carers with reference to Biblical justifications for purging him of the devil was placed with a devout Christian family, without adequate analysis of this decision on file. In another, a child whose family was from the Indian sub-continent was placed with White UK carers where even communication through a common language was a difficulty. In both cases the children should also have received services for their emotional and psychological needs.

#### *Professional expertise*

Some files raised questions about professional expertise towards these complex forms of abuse, with one discussion around "Type 1" female genital mutilation (whereby a cut is made but no other injury) suggesting that staff lacked a clear understanding of the abusive impact and illegality of this practice.

Case files suggested that professionals sometimes needed easier access to information about different cultures. For example, one case saw children admitted to the care of a local authority as a result of serious concerns about physical abuse, such as their heads being shaved and the existence of welt marks on the children's bodies. Whilst this action clearly protected the children, there was no consideration of the reasons behind such abuse and the threat of evil spirits only emerged some time later. In another case, professionals across agencies made no attempt to verify or challenge a mother's assertion that the controls she placed on her daughters were necessary because girls in Roma culture would be raped and married at the age of 12 if she did not keep them inside at all times.

#### *Thresholds and early intervention*

The threshold for intervention from either police or LA children's social care often appeared very high. In some cases, there were earlier opportunities to intervene but these were not acted upon and action appeared to be generated only when a definite threshold of actual harm had been crossed.

### **Case example**

One LA children's social care file contained details of a police officer's visit to a household. The officer's report on formal police notepaper included a description of a household where the windows were blackened with dark paper to keep out blackbirds carrying evil spirits and where cloves of garlic hung around the family home. The parent informed the police officer this was because one of her children was possessed by evil spirits. The police report concluded that the child was isolated in the family and referred the case to LA children's social care, who decided not to take any action on the grounds that there was no evidence of actual harm to the child. The case was referred back to LA children's social care within months when the child presented at school with injuries.

There was not always a depth of assessment and discussion with children or family members about concerns relating to the four specific areas of abuse. Whilst the police provided evidence of activity on their own files, those provided by LA children's social care recorded no evidence whatsoever of the police pursuing investigations of adults in any of the cases brought to file review by the local authorities.

### **Case example**

In one case, police and LA children's social services were notified of concerns about a young woman who claimed she had been brought to the UK illegally and then beaten and made to work in servitude at a private household in London. The girl claimed she had been left on her own by a man at Heathrow Airport and had subsequently found her carers on a street and realised they were from the same part of Angola as she was. When the young woman's video interview did not fully substantiate her earlier claims, there was no attempt made to interview the carers with regard to their part in possible trafficking of this girl or others.

These cases called for more thorough activity at an early stage of intervention, with professionals following basic standards of good practice. This is particularly relevant to the four specific areas of abuse studied through these file audits, as it is not likely that evidence of harm associated with female genital mutilation, honour based violence, spirit possession beliefs or trafficking will be clear at the outset of the case. Evidence of harm will often only emerge if the skilled practitioner is able to pursue suspicions in some depth and directly with children and young people over time.

### **Case example**

There was a delay of five months before a strategy meeting was convened to consider the case of a young man thought by police services to be involved in trafficking children into the UK as a result of his frequent trips to and from the country. At the strategy meeting, the man had not been interviewed. Although the police expressed grave reservations about this man's account, LA children's social care saw no reason to take action so long as there were no concerns reported in terms of direct harm to children.

These cases were examples of statutory agencies appearing to wait too long and to rely on a very definite level of harm to be in their possession before action was taken. The latter case was arguably also an example of one where the police hoped that LA children's social care would intervene when they believed they had too little evidence to prosecute whereas LA children's social care were content to do nothing without police action.

In the context of busy and pressurised referral services, this is not an easy thing to achieve – but it is worth highlighting for its importance in keeping children safe. There are also lessons for those holding the lead professional role under the new Common Assessment Framework arrangements, as these may be the professionals with significant initial contact with the children and young people affected by these issues.

#### *Case planning and outcomes*

There was a notable sense of more purposeful and through planning in cases once the threshold of likely or definite harm had been crossed and cases had the protection offered by the inter-agency child protection planning system.

However, whilst the files reviewed show the undoubted contribution that the police service made to the assessment and investigation process, none of the cases featured a prosecution. This absence of criminal action may suggest that the criminal justice system was not used to full force to safeguard children in these cases, and some files raised questions about whether the inaction in investigating the reported actions of some pastors was due to the fact that there are no legal grounds against calling a child a demon in front of a congregation of adults and children alike.

### **Case example**

In one case, the initial allegation made by a mother was that a pastor visiting homes had called her daughter a witch and suggested the daughter needed three days' worth of starvation without any food or water to rid her body of the devil. The specialist Project Violet team advised that this could construe an offence in terms of incitement to cause child cruelty, but police files supplied to the CPS were returned with advice to take no further action on the grounds that the allegations were now old and the pastor had referred correctly to a section of the bible in which it is said that possessed spirits should pray and fast until the devil is removed from their bodies. No criminal action ensued.

### **Case example**

In one case, two children aged 8 and 10 provided evidence to the police and LA children's social care that their mother, who believed in Kndoki (a form of witchcraft), had been abusing them through the use of chili peppers in the eyes and bottom and a number of physical assaults. The local authority succeeded in obtaining care orders even though the children later retracted their statements and wished to return to their mother. An expert witness provided evidence to the effect that the children were likely telling the truth in their video interviews, but the criminal case was eventually dropped as a result of the children changing their accounts - despite the availability of video evidence for use in the court.

Such cases should not be misinterpreted as indicating that bringing criminal cases in such situations is ever likely to be easy, and the threshold of proof required in civil and criminal courts is considerably different. However, this remains an issue that may leave some children exposed to risks of harm, and should not go unmentioned.

#### *Continuing challenges to partnership working*

In one case, two adults alleged that a pastor was carrying out deliverance on children by denying them food and water for a number of days, and that this practice had taken place in a number of British cities. In seeking to investigate these allegations, the police service was put in contact with a local faith organisation which sought, amongst other things, to improve child safeguarding in their community. However, after an introductory meeting the pastor was then unavailable on any of the multiple further attempts by police officers to contact him. The police concluded that the pastor, whilst seeking to develop improved approaches to safeguarding children, remained ambivalent when it came to upsetting members of the community. Local authorities and the police service may be able to approach this through developing a local dialogue with community leaders and members about the pressures and tensions they face / could face, and possible solutions, in relation to safeguarding children.

#### *Trafficking and exploitation*

The practice of sending children to live with relatives in parts of Africa was a feature in a number of cases, sometimes due to parents wishing to instill better manners into a young person or in reaction to fears of spirit possession. When this situation arose, professionals were often frustrated that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were unable to provide their usual level of assistance if the young person did not have British citizenship or temporary leave to remain in the UK, raising questions over the ability of statutory services in the UK and abroad to effectively safeguard children in a highly mobile global population. One way to address this situation could be the establishment of a safeguarding children protocol that fits international standards of child safety (perhaps in line with UN advice in respect of countries which have not signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).

The file review also raised questions about attitudes and approaches to the issue of illegal entry to the UK, with LA children's social care unable to take action simply because of the

likelihood of trafficking being behind arrival in the country (see thresholds and early intervention, above). Services designed for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people appeared to be primarily concerned with the provision of housing and financial assistance, at the expense of planning on the basis that young people might have been trafficked or that accounts of arrival in the UK might not be true. There were also cases where professionals might have obtained information from other countries' welfare organisations, notably Portugal and Mauritius, had embassies been contacted.

### **Case example**

Casework with a 17-year-old young woman focused considerable amounts of time and attention on her housing situation and future housing after the age of 18, often at the expense of planning around the emotional needs that arose from her experience of trafficking and sexual abuse. Meanwhile, further energy was spent arguing with the Home Office Immigration Nationality Department over whether the young woman was from Albania or Kosovo, as there were plans to refuse the young woman's request for consideration for repatriation on the grounds that she could not be repatriated to Albania when it was believed she was from Kosovo.

### *Good assessments*

The files highlighted the importance of standards within initial assessment and child protection investigation teams which, while generally high, could make a big impact when falling below acceptable levels. Cases varied considerably:

- A young person was encouraged to consider returning to Kosovo, even though her former abuser and boyfriend, who was said to have previously forced her into prostitution, was possibly there.
- Injuries were accepted as non-accidental despite a doctor's concerns about the likelihood of a toddler pulling an iron onto himself.
- A local authority sought to continue to work in equal partnership with a mother living in Bangladesh, even though she continued to state that her daughter in the UK should live with the man who had paid for the privilege of marriage to her and despite the child's fear of this relationship.

These situations were often exacerbated by delays in communication between LA children's social care and the police, and slow progress in information gathering in police enquiries.

### **Case example**

A father alleged that his ex-partner and mother to his daughter was planning to take their child abroad to undergo female genital mutilation. He also alleged that the mother attended a church group which had purchased human body parts for the purpose of sacrifices and that a member of her family had also been sacrificed abroad. While an exhaustive investigation into the female genital mutilation issue was undertaken (concluding that there was minimal risk to the child), there was no evidence on file of any investigation into the allegation made against the faith group.

The file audits also highlighted the importance of regular strategy meetings to ensure that delays in progressing investigations, which often occurred when it came to interviewing parents and children (particularly in cases of spirit possession), are kept to a minimum.

### *Disabled children*

In most cases involving beliefs that children were possessed by evil spirits, the child was disabled, had a learning difficulty, was autistic or was struggling at school. While the interplay between disability and belief in spirit possession is complex, the link was a strong one in a small number of cases.

### *Parental mental illness*

Perhaps surprisingly, none of the parents mentioned in the cases under review were noted as having formal mental health diagnoses of any kind, although police records did indicate concern about the mental state of parents in two of the cases in particular.

### *Public interest*

In some cases, social work and police activity seemed to focus too strongly on named individual children, neglecting the larger numbers who might be at risk from the alleged abusive practices of a faith group or pastor. This meant that there was no evidence obtained about the actual practices of such faith groups and this in turn appeared unjust to the faith groups concerned as well as to children who attended these groups.

### *Third party involvement*

Most cases did not include reference to the possible involvement of a faith leader in promoting abusive activities. Although this was a feature in four of the cases investigated by the police service, there was no evidence to warrant any formal charges being brought. The general picture was of families struggling to maintain a threatened system of family values or to deal with issues relating to difference, shame and behaviour, albeit with some individuals deliberately seeking to exploit often vulnerable teenagers.

## **4.5 Key messages from the file audits**

1. The four specific areas of child abuse (female genital mutilation, honour based violence, abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession and child trafficking and exploitation) are more common in London than suspected. Local authorities do not currently collect specific prevalence data for these cases, and consideration needs to be given to doing so.
2. There is a need for professionals in statutory agencies to renew their focus on applying consistently good practice standards, including:
  - Ensuring that assessments are informed by expertise in the four specific areas, and that they are broad enough to identify third party influence (e.g. a faith or community leader); and
  - That delay is minimised.
3. There is a need for professionals in statutory agencies to intervene more thoroughly at earlier stages of concern and not wait for an incident of abuse to happen before action can be taken. Professionals will need more training to do this and would benefit from sharing information about the four specific areas of child abuse across London.
4. Partnership working with local communities and faith groups is key to effectively safeguarding children. However, the degree of harm experienced by the children in these case audits confirmed the need for statutory agency professionals to have the confidence to act decisively to protect children when necessary.
5. Professionals in statutory services face challenges in identifying and responding to the four specific areas of child abuse, and need more training and access to a central resource for expert advice and information.

6. Police and LA children's social care must improve their responses when children's accounts of how they arrive in the UK raise concerns that they may have been trafficked.
7. Consideration needs to be given to how to streamline communication with foreign countries' embassies / consulates, police forces and welfare agencies when working to safeguard children. The current process of checking backgrounds of adults and children from abroad appeared laborious and difficult.
8. Procedures / protocols and training need to support statutory agency professionals to effectively investigate organisations where it is alleged that child abuse may be encouraged, rather than concentrating too strongly on the individual children affected.
9. Consideration needs to be given as to why police figures on reports of honour based violence towards children are significantly higher than both the numbers presented by local authorities for file review and the reports from CPAs and other staff from London boroughs of referrals to LA children's social care.

#### **4.6 Practitioner discussion groups**

Two facilitated, multi-agency discussion sessions were offered to professionals with experience in dealing with these types of abuse, creating an opportunity for greater analysis of the issues and concerns identified above than was available through the case files. Professionals from four of the eight participating boroughs took part in these sessions, with groups largely made up of representatives from social work, health and education, and generally agreed with the key issues identified through the file audits and the work of the CPAs. Professionals with experience of making links with community groups spoke of the difficulty in knowing whether changes in beliefs or behaviour had actually been achieved, and of the need for this work to be consistent and ongoing.

Other issues discussed and raised by professionals in these focus groups included:

- Many professionals agreed that young people presenting in the UK with questionable accounts of their arrival could be wrongly treated as asylum seeking rather than trafficked children, but also highlighted that many of these young people were not in fact harmed physically. Professionals believed it important that any requirement to challenge these accounts further should be done in the context of national or regional policy supported not only by London agencies but also by the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Department. Professionals also felt that London procedures around child trafficking would not in themselves lead to greater detection of children trafficked amidst numbers of new arrivals to the capital.
- Professionals discussed the key role that adult health services can play in protecting children from abuse through female genital mutilation, by undertaking an initial assessment when women who have undergone the procedure, and may now be parents themselves, present for corrective surgery or other treatment. However, professionals appreciated that issues of confidentiality and the large number of women attending specialist clinics may make this difficult, and suggested that a multi-agency service involving a social work or other professional to assess the risk to children could be the way forward.
- Professionals also highlighted the use of online safeguarding children training packages as a cost-effective means for community and faith groups to reach a wide audience, but warned that this would still required monitoring around actual take-up and impact.

- Professionals felt that schools and child and adolescent mental health services might be able to provide useful insights into the identification and treatment of needs over and above those identified within this project.

#### **4.7 Family discussion groups**

Although this project had intended to obtain the views of families who had come into contact with statutory services following concerns about one of the four specific forms of abuse, this eventually proved impossible as local authorities were unable to facilitate such contact. However, the accounts of parents and carers were available on many of the files reviewed, and included feedback such as:

- Difficulty in dealing with statutory agencies operating from a completely difference belief system (e.g. placing no value on beliefs involving spirit possession);
- Misunderstanding and ignorance of the law on female genital mutilation, particularly that all forms are illegal - including when carried out abroad;
- Persistence on the part of many young people about their means of arrival into the UK, parts of which might raise some suspicion;
- Beliefs that statutory agencies are over occupied with family concerns and not dealing with 'real' causes of harm to children, particularly relating to a perceived lack of discipline in the home.

The harm suffered by children in these cases was of an extreme form and was likely to leave a lasting impression on the young person for the rest of his or her life. The harm always included an emotional aspect, usually involving the use of fear to coerce children and young people into actions that they were not happy to carry out or into believing that they were responsible for the misery of others. In some cases, the harm was also physical and severe, involving welt marks, fractured bones and whiplashes on the back. The nature of the harm described in these cases is the clearest reminder that this project is fundamentally concerned with keeping children safe.

### **5. Community view**

In addition to the feedback received by the CPAs from communities and faith groups throughout the project, a number of community and faith group representatives were also invited to give their views specifically for this report. They were:

- Reverend Jean Bosco Kanyemesha, Pastor of the London Fire Church International Fellowship and Director of World Action Youth;
- Dr. Zulfiqar Ali, Chair of the Newham Muslim Alliance;
- Marion Eden, Child protection co-ordinator for the Emmanuel Christian Fellowship;
- Rev Jan Atkins, Methodist Minister at Stratford Methodist Church;
- Mohammed Hanad, a London student who is active in raising awareness of Somali youth concerns.

**Reverend Jean Bosco Kanyemesha**

*The community partnership advisor has been in touch with me, regarding the safeguarding of children in the Congolese community. I was consulted to develop certain projects within the community, initiated by the Community Partnership Project.*

*I very much appreciated the way I was approached by your organisation and the way I was welcomed. I was particularly impressed by the objectives and perspectives of the organisation as the issues we discussed were very important and concerning for the community. I was pleased that we were able to discuss these issues in detail.*

*From the discussions we had, I believe that we have developed a good relationship with both organisations. I deeply encourage this project to continue and prosper as I believe that the work conducted by Community Partnership Project could help the wellbeing of children in the community.*

*If the project is to be restructured, we would like to offer our services in being part of the delivery process in offering more strategic information and ways of tackling the issue of safeguarding children in order to help this project to achieve its objectives.*

**Dr. Zulfiqar Ali**

*We understand that [the CPA]'s appointment was for one year and she is likely to leave towards the end of this summer.*

*May we state that the time she has been in Newham we have found her very enthusiastic and a committed person who has made tremendous efforts to engage the community, particularly in relation to child protection policies and community development issues. Her work in reshaping the latest revised policy and the approach in this regard has been well appreciated and people feel truly consulted.*

*In our current social and political climate the Alliance values the time and resources allocated to building bridges with communities and faith groups that feel marginalised and due to this marginalisation may not necessarily feel confident in approaching the statutory sector, in particular social services, for guidance and support in relation to safeguarding children. It is our experience that the appointment of the community partnership advisor has gone some way in building bridges and raising the confidence of the community across faiths.*

*We are very close to finalising and launching the latest policy and it would be extremely valuable if [the CPA] remains to assist us in the training and implementation of this crucial piece of work, as this will ensure consistency and continuity which is vital when trust is a key component in engaging community and faith groups.*

*Consequently, it is desirable for this work to be secured and therefore extended for a further period to continue the co-operation and good work that has been undertaken between the social services, the community and other agencies.*

*We therefore hope you will give due consideration to our recommendation.*

**Marion Eden**

*I am part of the leadership team of Emmanuel Christian Fellowship, a Tamil speaking Christian Church in Manor Park. A few years ago, responding to the needs of our summer camp for girls, I wrote a child protection policy for our church. As we began implementing the policy it became clear that some of the leadership would be reluctant to report cases of possible abuse to Children's Services because of the effect this would have on relationships*

*with church members and the wider Tamil community. To try and improve this situation, I contacted Children's Services last year to ask if the leaders could have a meeting with someone to discuss the issues. I was put in touch with the community partnership adviser, and she and a colleague came and had a useful meeting with our leadership team. They gave us confidence that Children's Services is aiming to help our families, not criticise our community.*

*The community partnership adviser has also given us advice on writing a leaflet about child protection for parents. This has been translated and we hope to issue it soon. The community partnership adviser is going to address a meeting for parents in a few week's time.*

*I have found the collaboration with the community partnership adviser very useful and feel that we have really only begun what could be a long term collaboration on child protection issues. My one complaint would be that the community partnership adviser has been so busy that we have had to wait some months for each thing we have done together. She has obviously had far more to do than time has allowed. I think that not only should this project be continued, but it should be enlarged to employ several staff. The needs of faith communities for help with child protection issues, and the contribution they can make in this area, should not be neglected.*

### **Rev Jan Atkins**

*I am happy to provide a paragraph on my experience of the project.*

*The community partnership advisors have worked in partnership with the Methodist Church. I felt we were treated as equal partners, and the needs of our church explored with us. A result of this was that the partnership advisors participated in the annual Safeguarding Officers Conference in January, which focused on the cultural aspects of safeguarding in churches in a multi-faith environment. A further conference was planned for June, which focused particularly in the issues of church related abuse, particularly spirit possession and how to protect children in churches. This conference was open to all in the church who were interested and attended by ministers and people working directly with children. There were some people from other churches who lease Methodist premises, including people from Russia and the Philippines, as well as some from independent black churches. The information provided and opportunity to discuss issues was excellent and many have made links with their local CPAs. My CPA was unable to come on the day, but I have met with her locally.*

*My experience of this left me impressed that faith was respected and treated as a normal aspect of life. What was most important was that the people working in the partnership were both knowledgeable, accepting and approachable. I think this contact has helped to break down barriers which can make people hesitant about contacting social services.*

### **Mohammed Hanad**

*I believe that this project has been effective in engaging with community groups and particularly, from my point of view, with young people. One especially positive achievement in Camden was the "let us talk about it!" event, which focused on changing the attitudes of young Somali men towards FGM. I was involved as one of two youth outreach workers and, together with the community partnership adviser, we managed to attract 22 young men aged between 18-28 to the workshop. At first, the youths seemed reluctant to engage in discussions as, in accordance to the male ideology, "this was an issue which didn't affect them and due to its sensitivity shouldn't be discussed". However, as the workshop progressed further, there seemed to be a change in attitude and, after various heated*

*debates, a large number of the young men had changed their perspective of FGM and were proposing solutions to actually prevent this from occurring. From a personal perspective, the workshop was immensely beneficial as it not only increased the awareness of FGM but also created a platform for further discussion to take place.*

*The 'let us talk about it!' project was well supported and brought together a number of different groups, including social services, the Met Police and a number of voluntary agencies. I believe this level of engagement wouldn't have been possible without the existence of the CPA, who was able to bring all these groups together to encourage the Somali community to discuss a taboo and culturally sensitive issue. In particular, social services and the police are often feared by the Somali community because of the perception that they are there to 'punish' and not for 'support'. The fact that the 'let us talk about it!' project allowed them to reach out to the Somali youth to help them understand the laws around child protection and existing support provision was a good first step towards building trust. I believe that many more of these workshops need to take place to build on this good work, and the role of the community partnership adviser will again be crucial in making this happen.*

#### **Community view:**

- Various community groups were mistrustful of children and young people's services;
- They had a lack of understanding about the role and remit of children and young people's services;
- They felt that a one year project was tokenistic and illustrated a lack of commitment, motivation and disregard for engaging with them.

## **6. London Local Safeguarding Children Boards' activity**

In response to the diversity of London's population, the majority of London LSCBs have initiated work programmes to support the safeguarding of children in local communities and faith groups. In the light of the findings from this Community Partnership Project, this work is essential and has the potential to make a significant positive impact on the welfare and wellbeing of London's children and their families.

The London LSCBs are aware that information sharing and joint-working across London greatly enhances the effectiveness of local endeavours. During the course of the project, seminars co-hosted by the London Board and the Metropolitan Police Child Abuse Investigation Command brought together the eight participating boroughs with the other London LSCBs and representatives of the Territorial Police Service (borough police), and proved very useful for exchanging information and sharing good practice and resources.

Accordingly, the London LSCBs have requested that the London Board should continue to provide a degree of centralised support for this work across London.

London LSCB activity is described in more detail in Appendix 2.

## **7. Overall project findings**

### **7.1 Community activity findings**

- 1. The children who form part of the local communities and faith groups reached by this project have an improved chance of being safe both in relation to the four specific areas of child abuse (female genital mutilation, honour based violence, abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession and child trafficking and exploitation), and more generally.**

The Community Partnership Project has found that most parents and carers are willing to make considerable efforts to prioritise their children's safety and best interests. This is the basis for continuing to use these community education approaches to improve children's safeguarding.

A wide range of communities and faith groups / organisations contacted through the project now have access to information about the need to keep children safe, their responsibilities to contribute towards this aim and how to achieve it. Through this project, London has opened up the possibility for a much wider programme of community engagement and responsibility in tackling specific forms of child abuse and neglect. The project has therefore made a big contribution to the responsibility of London's LSCBs to extend safeguarding to a wide local audience.

- 2. Communities are keen to protect their children and there is scope for capacity-building within local communities to help them to do so.**

Local communities and faith groups are very concerned to protect their children, and many are successfully promoting the safeguarding of children within their activities and social networks.

Once contacted, many communities are keen for more information and engagement, to improve individual families' knowledge and use of available services, promote their children's welfare and protect them from harm.

Communities invariably bring their own priority issues:

- Discipline and issues related to the tensions between the first and second generations of immigrant families (i.e. parents struggling with their children's 'lack of respect' for their mother culture's values and norms; children struggling with 'strict or restrictive' parenting);
- Truancy;
- Substance misuse;
- Gangs and weapons;
- Sexual promiscuity / exploitation, especially for girls and young women;
- Domestic violence.

- 3. Communities generally make little use of statutory services and want information on schools, health care (especially GP registration), immigration, benefits etc. Their primary requirement is for information giving, signposting and referral.**

The communities reached by the project were, to varying degrees, isolated / excluded from mainstream society through their difficulty with communicating in English and lack of confidence in and knowledge about accessing local services.

**4. Successful engagement depends on dedicated personal contact. The appointment of CPAs, who were able to focus exclusively on this area of work, was key to the success of the project.**

Although some communities were more reluctant to engage, the CPAs' personal contact proved a highly effective way to break down initial barriers and proved to be the key to changing their perspective.

The CPAs were undoubtedly also the key in enabling local authorities to make contact and form productive relationships with local communities and faith groups, and were also able to build effective partnerships with the Metropolitan Police Child Abuse and Territorial Policing teams. This project highlighted the scope of safeguarding children work with local communities and faith groups, which is so wide that a dedicated CPA or equivalent is needed in order to make progress. The CPA post must be offered by or commissioned closely by local authorities, and successful applicants should have the skills to develop community relations while maintaining the focus on child protection.

**5. Successful engagement depends largely on a respectful and politically sensitive approach rather than on the ethnicity and cultural / religious background of the outreach workers.**

The ethnic and cultural / religious backgrounds of the CPAs was not relevant to their appointment, as long as the adviser was someone with integrity, flexibility, political sensitivity and good communication and partnership working skills, with a strong knowledge of UK child protection practice.

Where a CPA was of a similar or same ethnic background to a local community, this provided easier access in most cases. However, it could prove a possible barrier for fear in the community about confidentiality. The CPAs worked across boroughs to reduce this, to train each other and to provide a gender lead / balance where needed.

**6. Communities and statutory agencies need to develop mutual trust and understanding, with communities and faith groups often unclear about the roles and responsibilities of statutory services. This can only be achieved through sustained commitment to local community and faith group engagement, and the short term nature of this Community Partnership Project exposes it to accusations of 'tokenism'.**

The development of trust and confidence between statutory services and the local communities and faith groups was the most important factor for the successful dialogue and activity needed to safeguard the communities' children.

Although making initial contact has sometimes required exhaustive efforts from the CPAs, they have then been able to make a significant difference to some communities relatively easily because their needs are so basic. The primary requirement is for information giving, signposting and referral.

Through the provision of training, the project provided an opportunity to dispel the myths and anxieties about LA children's social care services undermining family life and taking children into care. It has succeeded in building trust between statutory services and communities and faith groups.

**Practice examples**

Black and ethnic minority community groups have been making referrals to LA children's social care through the community partnership adviser. This is a reflection of the trust that has developed and the augmented knowledge that has been obtained through the workshops undertaken.

When they realised that the project was only 12 months long, communities and faith groups expressed serious concerns about the short timescale and tended to label the project as 'tokenistic'. Their view was that there was less value in devoting time, energy and resources to a relationship with statutory services when the latter were intending to withdraw that relationship later on.

The CPAs reported that the time-limited nature of their post complicated the development of relationships with local communities and faith groups. The project was too short to really begin to tackle the more deep-seated tensions and difficulties facing the communities – of which safeguarding children forms an integral part. This will need sustained local community and faith group engagement both through non-statutory outreach on behalf of the statutory services and by integrating partnership working into mainstream services.

Some community groups feel over consulted and they want action – access to parenting classes; training on issues such as domestic violence, anti-social behaviour, and safeguarding their children; representation in the LA children's social care workforce; and easily accessible information on issues such as education, housing, private fostering, UK law and safeguarding children.

**7. Many communities are unfamiliar with UK law in relation to the threshold between lawful and unlawful child rearing practices. Although this issue is not specific to minority communities, their additional isolation from other mainstream services and society exacerbates the situation.**

The project demonstrated the critical importance of this community partnership work being underpinned by a sound understanding of safeguarding children practice. The CPAs were empowered to speak to local communities and faith groups as representatives of their LSCB – with an unequivocal message that children must be safeguarded.

This approach was supported by the original decision of the London Board that London local authorities should be directly responsible for the CPA posts, rather than the advisers being appointed from outside the councils or their representatives.

The CPAs' needed to have the skills to engage the local communities and faith groups in owning the agenda and taking a lead in promoting children's safeguarding.

**8. The profile of culturally sensitive safeguarding children issues has been raised.**

The four specific areas of child abuse (female genital mutilation, honour based violence, abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession and child trafficking and exploitation) are often avoided by both statutory agencies and local communities, usually due to a lack of understanding on the part of the former and cultural sensitivities from local communities and faith groups. The work of the CPAs has helped to address both of these issues, and successfully raised the profile of these forms of abuse.

**9. Many of the children and young people engaged through this work were open to discussion and debate around their beliefs and experiences, and are keen to be able to influence their own communities on safeguarding issues.**

Where the CPAs sought contact with youth groups and provided sessions in schools, they were well received and encountered groups of children and young people who were already, or were keen to, take the safeguarding message to their peers and communities.

**10. The statutory services acquired better knowledge of their local communities and faith groups.**

The activity of the CPAs led to greater awareness of local communities and faith groups by local authorities and LSCBs. The project succeeded in making links into local communities and faith groups that had not existed before – the CPAs were very successful in making contact with hitherto isolated groups.

The CPAs reported that the knowledge they acquired about the local communities and faith groups was often invaluable to statutory services, who were also keen to tap into the CPAs' expertise around the four specific areas of child abuse.

Through dedicated outreach, statutory services significantly improved their knowledge of local communities and faith groups, particularly on issues such as:

- Differences within communities, which can relate to a family's belonging to a particular clan or to when the family / community settled in the UK;
- Differences of perspective between the older / younger, male / female and community members / leadership within communities;
- The trend that learning / behaviour disabilities make a child more likely to be accused of spirit possession;
- The high mobility of certain faith groups who meet in short term lets on light industrial estates or other halls.

**7.2 File audit findings**

**11. The project has confirmed that the four specific areas of child abuse are not uncommon in London.**

The information gained from local authorities and the Metropolitan Police indicates that concerns about the four specific areas of child abuse, particularly abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession and child trafficking and exploitation, were not uncommon in London. Whilst exact prevalence is not known, the existence of the cases reviewed in this project is enough to warrant these matters being a legitimate cause of concern for local and central Government alike.

**12. Although there is evidence that the threshold exercised by statutory services in relation to child protection is appropriate, there remains a need to promote consistent good practice.**

There should be a renewed focus on applying consistently good practice standards.

The Community Partnership Project focus was on the four specific areas of child abuse: female genital mutilation, honour based violence, spirit possession and child trafficking and exploitation. However, the local communities raised a range of safeguarding children issues. Some community and faith organisation representatives and members expressed concern that statutory systems to safeguard children focused too heavily on child protection and were not at all occupied with safeguarding young people from the risks attached to smoking, use of alcohol, under-age sexual relationships, drug use and anti-social behaviour.

This view is supported by the *Every Child Matters* initiative which has broadened the focus so that children at risk of harm are both children in families where abuse or neglect are concerns and also those who for are exposed to other dangers inside or outside the family home.

The CPAs also identified the need for safeguarding children activity to support isolated and excluded children to enable them to take part in activities in the community. Without consistent good practice in areas such as this, LSCBs are likely to find a gap between the focus of professional services and focus of some communities in terms of safeguarding children.

**13. There is a need for earlier multi-agency intervention in cases where this type of abuse is suspected.**

Agencies should aim for committed and knowledgeable intervention at the early stages of contact with a child and their family, and not wait for an incident of abuse to happen before action can be taken.

There is a need for greater awareness and information sharing amongst professionals from all agencies of the circumstances and early indicators that may suggest a child is at risk of abuse – this is particularly relevant to the four specific areas of child abuse.

Professionals coming into contact with children need to have more confidence to work jointly and pro-actively whenever there is reasonable suspicion that a child has been or is likely to be subject to female genital mutilation, a child is threatened by use of violence in the name of family or community honour, a child is affected by adult beliefs in spirit possession or a child has been trafficked and exploited.

**14. Professionals in statutory services face challenges in identifying and responding to the four specific areas of child abuse, and need more training and access to a central resource for expert advice and information.**

The file audits in particular highlighted that professionals in statutory services face some challenges in identifying and responding to the four specific areas of child abuse, and children's social workers also need more training on the impact of cultural backgrounds and beliefs and their influence on safeguarding.

This project has highlighted some of the ways that this can be achieved, with professionals' awareness of the issues which were central to this project having been heightened through the casework advice offered by the CPAs, feedback to LA children's social care from the file review, staff discussion groups, seminars and conferences and the local publicity attracted by a number of the CPAs about their role. However, agencies across London would greatly benefit from having easy access to advice and a central information bank in respect of these four areas.

Consideration needs to be given to what part individual professional response played in police figures on reports of honour based violence towards children being significantly higher than both the numbers presented by local authorities in the file audits and the reports from CPAs and other staff from London boroughs of referrals to LA children's social care.

**15. The project has shown that partnership working between London boroughs is both essential and achievable, and London would benefit from a co-ordinated, centralised approach to information gathering and sharing.**

There is a need for co-ordinated, centralised information gathering and sharing across the boroughs because communities and faith groups cross borough boundaries, and there are pockets of communities from the same country of origin across London. The boroughs can learn from each other and work jointly to engage with them. This is particularly important with regard to the project's four key issues.

Partnership working between the eight participating boroughs proved essential for effective contact in terms of the communities' and faith groups' cross-boundary activity, the need on occasion for the CPAs to be a particular ethnicity or gender and for peer support for the advisers. This involved an acceptance that resources funded by one authority could be used in another and vice versa. This project has also provided a successful experience of commissioning future collaborative regional projects in London.

There has been keen interest in the Community Partnership Project nationally. The CPAs and representatives from the communities and faith groups they work with have provided presentations and workshops at national conferences around both the four specific areas of child abuse and also on general partnership working with communities and faith groups to safeguard children. Enquiries have been received for advice from other parts of the UK following national professional press coverage of the Community Partnership Project, and the project resources are available nationally from the London Board's website ([www.londonscb.gov.uk](http://www.londonscb.gov.uk)).

#### **16. Improvement is needed in systems to access information from abroad.**

Communication with foreign countries' embassies and consulates and welfare agencies appeared laborious and difficult, and there could be scope to streamline this when issue is the safeguarding of vulnerable children.

### **7.3 Effective methods of engagement**

The project findings in terms of effective engagement with local communities and faith groups include the following:

1. Persistence and personal contact was needed from the CPA with the local communities, faith groups and other agencies. Examples of where making and sustaining contact is difficult include street pastorships and community groups working with children which are based within homes and even internet cafes.
2. The CPAs needed to be flexible in the times and venues for them and the statutory services to meet groups. There was a very positive response when the statutory agencies went out to groups rather than expecting groups, with limited time and money etc to come to the statutory sector.

#### **Practice example**

The CPA had spoken on three occasions by telephone and exchanged e-mail correspondence with a pastor and arranged to meet at 7pm on Sunday evening, which was the time the pastor held meetings with other senior figures in his church. The CPA was not met on this occasion and was left alone in a car park. The CPA eventually did meet with the pastor through persistence and understanding that times of meetings of small faith groups are highly flexible and mobile; the CPA was able to use his skills to demonstrate that the LSCB could meet the needs of this group for training and guidance around safeguarding children at whatever time this was needed.

3. Responsiveness is needed in adapting to local communities' and faith groups' needs.
4. The CPAs needed to understand politics within and between community groups in order to work well with them. In these situations a collective approach was not possible.

5. Developing relationships at the communities' or faith group's pace, not imposing an external agenda on them too early in the relationship, is a cornerstone in developing trust. It is also a prerequisite for the communities and faith groups to own and act on the safeguarding children agenda themselves.
6. A budget for activities – the ability to provide the training free has had a great impact on take up by groups who have little or no income for this type of event.
7. The size of the task in each authority is such that a CPA can only work through the use of forums already in existence, and the relatively isolated position of a CPA – as a link person between agencies / groups – meant that they worked best when acting jointly with other CPAs and with good support from the local authority.

### **Practice example**

The success of the Community Partnership Project lies primarily in the partnership work amongst the existing community partnership advisers across London, the statutory agencies, the Met Police, voluntary sector and the targeted community organisations.

8. The very good outcomes achieved by the CPAs working with young people in two of the boroughs indicates that working with headteachers and in schools would have a significant impact on the safeguarding of children in local communities

## **8. Conclusion**

### **8.1 Summary conclusion**

The London Community Partnership Project has been extraordinarily successful in raising awareness of safeguarding children in a number of London local communities and faith groups. The need for better engagement with local communities and faith groups to safeguard children has been established. The project has also uncovered the fact that communities and faith groups are keen to be involved.

Implementation of the CPA model of dedicated personal outreach to establish contact with socially isolated / excluded communities and faith groups has been a very effective way to achieve improved partnership with communities and faith groups both on specific child protection issues and also on a range of other issues which contribute to the welfare and safety of London's children.

The project has promoted awareness of the four specific areas of child abuse amongst professionals in the statutory services and enabled them to reflect on current child protection practice. It has promoted a degree of cross-borough working in London which is not commonly witnessed.

Sustained joint-working with local communities and faith groups to improve the health and welfare of their children is proving to be a very useful vehicle in the development of local community cohesion and integration.

The success of the CPA role, the need for sustained contact with communities and the potential damage of withdrawing from newly developed relationships is reflected in the fact that of the eight authorities involved in the Community Partnership Project, at least four are either making the CPA post a permanent feature or extending the post until the end of the 2007-08 financial year.

## 8.2 Risk analysis of withdrawal

### Risk analysis of withdrawal

The project has been the first of its kind within London and there is a clear need for further work to be done with communities. Communities have begun to engage with the project and have identified the need for continuing work. Therefore, withdrawing at this stage will invariably send the message that statutory services are not committed to working with communities.

Safeguarding children has different meanings, especially within the context of one's cultural background. There is a need to ensure that all communities have a firm understanding and failure to deliver training and engage with communities and faith groups will undoubtedly risk children not being safeguarded.

In relation to forced marriage, some members of the community think that it is synonymous to arranged marriage. This slippage in understanding of what forced marriage is creates problems with identifying the extent of the problem. Therefore, there is a need to continue to increase the awareness of this problem through community initiatives.

Even within communities where female genital mutilation is practiced, there is a lack of understanding with regard to the differing categories/types and the law. There is also an acceptance of performing type 1, which is called *Sunna* among some members of the community. Failure to continue the work of raising awareness about the law and health consequences will continue to place some children at risk.

This project has also allowed members of the community to voice the problems they experience and what their training needs are. Therefore, failure to follow-up on providing training for communities on issues they face (e.g. domestic violence and youth violence/crime) will fail to effectively safeguard children.

There continue to be referrals involving the four areas this project has focused on, with the majority concerning spirit possession. This identifies a need to increase awareness especially among professionals.

With regard to female genital mutilation, the community groups working in this area need to have a co-ordinated approach that will include working with the Local Safeguarding Children Board. If the work of the community partnership adviser comes to an end, these community groups will undoubtedly feel affronted. It will set back the good work that has been done and may place children at risk.

Community groups and places of worship require assistance with accessing where criminal records bureau checks could be undertaken within the community and the importance of undertaking these checks.

Part of the role of Local Safeguarding Children Boards now involves increasing awareness of the four areas, and the government advised there is a need to engage communities particularly around forced marriage. Similarly, the 2006 report to DfES on child abuse linked to allegations of spirit possession recommended that LSCBs should identify places of worship within their area and build links with them in order to monitor effective child protection measures, and this recommendation was accepted by the government. Therefore, failure to continue work in this area would leave some children at risk, especially given the proportion of such cases within London and the high profile cases involving local pastors.

### 8.3 Recommendations

The London Community Partnership Project has been successful in raising awareness of safeguarding children in a number of London local communities and faith groups and in London statutory services. It has enabled reflection on current child protection practice and has promoted a degree of cross-borough working in London which is not commonly witnessed.

The aims of the project have been achieved and need to be maintained. Based on the findings from the project, the recommendations are that:

#### Project recommendations

The project recommendations are that:

1. The London Safeguarding Children Board (the London Board) seeks funding, on behalf of the London Local Safeguarding children Boards (LSCBs), from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), Department of Health and the Home Office, to continue to support the work undertaken in the Community Partnership Project, and particularly the intensive personal contact that this requires.
2. London LSCBs dedicate part of their annual plan to the development of communities' and faith groups' awareness of all aspects of safeguarding children, with particular attention to the needs of Black and minority ethnic communities and minority faith groups.
3. The London Board and London LSCBs start to collect data in a consistent fashion around the four specific areas of child abuse (female genital mutilation, honour based violence, abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession and child trafficking and exploitation).
4. The London Board and London LSCBs consider including domestic violence information in the dataset outlined in point 3 above, since this was raised as an issue by the communities, is very prevalent in the general population and is closely linked to honour based violence.
5. The London Board should make the tools and resources developed during the project available to all London LSCBs through its website ([www.londonscb.gov.uk](http://www.londonscb.gov.uk)). This will need to be maintained and regularly updated by the London Board, in conjunction with key staff involved in this work with communities in London.
6. The London Board should continue to provide a co-ordination function for the London LSCBs' work with local communities and faith groups.
7. The London Board should ensure that safeguarding children practice in response to the four specific areas of child abuse is supported by up-to-date procedures and practice guidance.
8. The London Board should seek better links for London statutory services with the Borders and Immigration Service to support safeguarding children activity.
9. The London Board should represent to the Crown Prosecution Service the need for there to be more prosecutors in London with specialist knowledge in relation to children and the four specific areas of child abuse.
10. The London Board should support London LSCBs in addressing the safeguarding aspects of young people behaving or at risk of behaving in anti-social ways. This issue was raised by the communities themselves.

11. The London Board should support London agencies to follow through investigations to ensure that, when there has been an allegation of potential or actual harm to a child in a community or faith group, that the group remains a safe place for children.
12. The London Board and London LSCBs should support schools to promote awareness of the four specific areas of child abuse and safeguarding of children in general, particularly to local Black and minority ethnic communities and minority faith groups.
13. The London Board should approach central government for support to improve communication between UK policing and local authority services and welfare and governmental organisations abroad.

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Christine Christie, London Safeguarding Children Board, July 2007

## Appendix 1

### File Audit Tool

#### London Safeguarding Children Board Community Partnership Project FILE AUDIT TOOL

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1. FILE NO.
  2. Local Authority:
  3. Date of Audit:
- 

#### Basic file details

1. Is ethnicity recorded? What is ethnicity? Is nationality recorded? Immigration status where applicable for individual adults and child/ren?
  2. Is Religion recorded?
  3. Are names recorded consistently on file and between agency records?
  4. Are family and friendship relationships recorded, and consistent and accurate?
  5. Is address recorded?
  6. Is there a clear list of key professionals recorded at the front of the file?
  7. Is there a chronology updated in last 6 months? (only where case is open)
- 

#### Nature of concerns referred

1. Who referred?
2. Was referral made in detail and communicated in writing?
3. What was the nature of the concern? (physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect- where concern is about a matter not identified as abuse or neglect at the point of referral please state as such. Where a concern, state background, e.g. Child out of control, alcohol or drug misuse, domestic violence)

4. Were there concerns about child abuse or neglect involving custom and ritual? (e.g. honour violence, missing or trafficked children, FGM, or spirit possession) If so what were these
  5. Did referrer state a view as to what needed to happen?
  6. Was there a previous history of referrals? If Yes, how long has case been known to agency and summarise nature of previous concerns
  7. Was there analysis developed or shared jointly with other agencies?
- 

### **Initial response**

1. What was the initial response? (NFA, initial assessment, core assessment, s47 enquiries)
  2. Was outcome of initial assessment/s47 enquires clear or was it clear why no actions was taken further to receipt of referral and information gathering?
  3. How was information shared and was this appropriate? (e.g. shared in discussion, face to face or telephonic)
  4. Was analysis and decision-making jointly undertaken between agencies?
  5. Was there disagreement between agencies- if so what was this?
- 

### **Later planning**

1. Was there a Strategy Meeting? Who attended? If not were there strategy discussions and who was involved? Was someone/agency with specialist knowledge consulted?
2. How did meetings consider needs and likely harm to children?
3. Was there a Child Protection conference?
4. If Yes, did this analyse the concerns and strengths of family care for child/ren adequately?

5. Was child or were children placed on CPR? If so why and under what category? For how long were children on CPR? (if subject to conference but not registered, state why not registered)
6. Did any children moved to live elsewhere? Was this under terms of agreed accommodation, a family arrangement supported by local authority or a removal by court order into care? Describe circumstances
7. How was child cared for away from home- e.g. foster placement, residential care, within borough, neighbouring borough, more than 20 miles away, etc.)

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### **Diversity**

1. Was there any specific reference on records as to how plan would deal with child's or family's cultural or religious needs?
2. Was consultation outside of line management used around issues related to diversity? (If not, would this have been of potential use?)
3. Was there any consideration of a concern of abuse or neglect being a concern about a widely accepted cultural practice. If so, was there evidence that such a practice was researched so that the practitioner knew that this was the case? Were any assumptions made around cultural stereotyping which impacted upon decision-making in this case?
4. Were interpreters used and was written communication translated? Were these services appropriate, e.g. avoidance of use of children or neighbours or friends of family etc

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### **Case management**

1. Was there evidence of regular supervision or management oversight and input with supervision and management decisions recorded on files?
2. Did management input concentrate on plan and quality of assessment or intervention?
3. Was there evidence of any independent quality check?
4. Was there evidence of regular audit and follow up to audit recommendations?
5. Was there evidence that a change of plan was needed e.g. because new information had come to notice? Was the plan accordingly changed?

**Service user views**

1. Were views of all children and adults considered and recorded and were all advised of plans in a way suitable for age and understanding?
- 

**General**

1. Indicate areas of concern not identified above and areas of good practice.
-

## Appendix 2

### London Local Safeguarding Children Boards' activity

#### Barnet

In conjunction with Enfield, Barnet co-hosted a highly successful 'Safeguarding across our faith communities' conference 18 months ago. Since then, Barnet have continued to build links with their diverse communities, partly through increased representation from the faith sector on Barnet's Safeguarding Children Board and its sub groups (e.g. the chair of the multi-faith forum is a member of the Board and Norwood (Jewish care) is represented on the training sub-group). Other initiatives from Barnet include:

- Holding a very well received collaborative event on forced marriage, together with the Barnet Asian Women's Association and Somali and other community groups;
- Working with members of the orthodox Jewish community to increase awareness of their safeguarding responsibilities and promote culturally accessible training, hopefully through a 'train the trainers' model whereby community leaders can be trained to deliver training;
- Providing a range of training tailored to the needs of communities, including on site training within synagogues and some Sunday and evening child protection training sessions;
- Developing guidance for private, voluntary and independent sector and providing regular workshops to help this sector develop child protection policies and procedures;
- Linking with the London Board to share best practice;
- Actively engaging in dialogue with community groups about current safeguarding issues including female genital mutilation and male circumcision, and facilitating appropriate contribution to the draft London Child Protection Procedures.

#### Bromley

Work engaging faith communities and voluntary sector groups within Bromley is a priority, but limited due to restraints on staff time. At this time the work being undertaken includes:

- Bromley Safeguarding Children Board working to locate all of the faith communities within the borough and use this information to build a database;
- Budget allowing, a half-day will be held with all stakeholders to discuss child protection with in faith communities;
- Bromley Safeguarding Children Board collecting and reviewing Child Protection Procedures from voluntary community groups and faith groups;
- Child Protection Procedure template being made available to voluntary community groups and faith groups who do not have procedures;
- Bromley Safeguarding Children Board members receiving training from the Board's Ethnic Communities Project Manager;
- Membership of the Bromley Safeguarding Children Board and Executive to include members of local community groups and faith groups;
- Bromley Safeguarding Children Board training courses being made available at no cost to all local not-for-profit agencies / groups.

## **Camden**

Camden was one of the eight boroughs involved in the Community Partnership Project, and the Camden Safeguarding Children Board has a Community Engagement Sub-group. The Community Partnership Project Manager has been a member of this sub-group. The council's Multi-faith Senior Policy Officer is also a member of the sub-group. Hopscotch (Asian Women's Centre) is also represented, together with representatives from the Congolese community.

Training has been delivered via the Community Engagement Sub -group to the Muslim community (so far, the group has held one session for Imams and a second for a wider group, delivered in both Bengali and English); and also to Congolese parents (with another session planned). The communities approached have been very enthusiastic about attending these sessions.

## **Croydon**

Croydon Safeguarding Children Board works closely with its SELAH subgroup, a Christian advisory group that was founded 2 years ago to advise the Director of Social Services on safeguarding issues in Black and minority ethnic communities. SELAH members are enthusiastic about working with LA children's social care and have welcomed child protection training. The first batch of training was delivered last year, followed by training for pastors this year.

Early this year a second advisory group was set up to establish dialogue between the Croydon Safeguarding Children Board and the Muslim community. Consultation has resulted in a number of initiatives, including the rolling out of child protection training for local Islamic schools, beginning with Al-Khair Cultural and Educational Centre – the next training session is scheduled at Croydon Mosque towards the end of the year.

Other initiatives include:

- Workshops to help faith groups compete for funding;
- A local faith group has recently set up a support group, the Calabash Project Croydon (CPC), to work with young men in the black community around the issues of gun / knife crime;
- A faith strategy / cultural diversity guide to be published shortly;
- Faith groups are now linked with other departments, including the Adults in Need Team, Older People and Physical Disabilities and Sensory Impairment;
- Work has extended to adult safeguarding – a train the trainer scheme has been initiated to enable faith groups to receive tailor-made courses that meet their needs around safeguarding issues;
- Work is underway, in partnership with faith groups, to deliver cultural competency training across social care;
- An inter-faith conference is planned for autumn 2007.

## **Ealing**

The Ealing Safeguarding Children Board has a Faith Groups Sub-group with representatives from all of the major faith groups. The Sub-group has a workplan, limited in scope by lack of funds. The workplan focuses primarily on introducing and embedding child protection policies and procedures into the faith settings. Later this year the Ealing Safeguarding Children Board is due to launch updated Voluntary Sector Child Protection Procedures and will disseminate these to all faith groups.

A key issue for Ealing Safeguarding Children Board is how to engage with the myriad of small community and faith groups operating in the borough. LB Ealing has recently provided grant aid [a fairly small sum of money] to the Victoria Climbié Foundation to undertake some work with community and faith groups on Child Protection. The Victoria Climbié Foundation is represented on the Faith Groups Sub-group, providing a link for support to the work and integration with other strands of the Sub-group's workplan.

### **Hammersmith and Fulham**

Hammersmith and Fulham Safeguarding Children Board has recently established an Equalities and Faith Communities Sub-group which includes officers from child protection, youth offending, management information and training; also voluntary sector infrastructure representatives and the PCT equalities lead. The local community and voluntary sector network recently ran an election to help the Hammersmith and Fulham Safeguarding Children Board identify a faith community representative, who will also be joining the group.

The Equalities and Faith Communities Sub-group is currently developing an Equalities Impact Assessment template for use by children's services providers in the voluntary and community sectors. The group has also been scrutinizing:

- The ethnic and gender profiles of children who are subject to child protection plans;
- Issues for young refugees and asylum seekers; and
- The profile of young people known to the youth offending team.

In future, the Sub-group will play a role in signing off all equality impact assessments in the LA children's social care department.

In addition to the Equalities and Faith Communities Sub-group, community and voluntary organisations are very much involved in other aspects of Hammersmith and Fulham Safeguarding Children Board work, including domestic violence, training, developing child protection templates, and planning the rollout of the new London Child Protection Procedures.

### **Harrow**

Voluntary agencies, faith and community groups provided significant input to Harrow's Children and Young People's Plan, and have since expressed a keen interest in working with statutory agencies, revising the Plan and raising awareness of the preventative work they conduct.

Harrow Safeguarding Children Board also provides funding to enable voluntary agencies to implement criminal records bureau checking procedures, and have provided a wide variety of information tailored to the requirements of Somali and other minority groups to raise awareness of a range of safety issues, including safe use of the internet, home alone and bullying.

Parents are supported through the extended schools' core offer delivery, with programmes such as the 'Strengthening Families – Strengthening Communities' pilot at the Kenton Learning Centre aimed at newly arrived communities (particularly Somali families) from a local school and those speaking community languages.

The Harrow Safeguarding Children Board also rolled out a programme of consultation and engagement with young women from the Somali community, which resulted in their putting forward a successful bid for Positive Action for Young People funding.

Harrow Safeguarding Children Board has been active in raising awareness of child trafficking, holding a number of sessions following from a seminar and workshop held in conjunction with ECPAT UK last year. A child trafficking training module has been devised by

the LA children's social care asylum service, in partnership with the Policy and Procedures Sub-group of the Safeguarding Children Board and Harrow Organisational Development. The training is provided by the asylum service and is open to all LA departments who work directly with children.

Other projects include:

- One in which a local school cluster has recruited parents and carers as volunteers to represent and empower their own communities, helping to develop a range of resources and support networks for often marginalised groups; and
- Various 'community into work' events, held at local schools and aiming to provide information and support to members of local communities who are looking to get into employment.

### **Islington**

Over the past year the Islington CPA focused on creating positive working relationships between faith groups and new communities and the statutory and voluntary sectors. The CPA's aim was to break down barriers between communities and faith groups and, in particular, statutory service providers and to encourage these groups to access mainstream services. The work has included training and advice around child protection and safeguarding children and providing information about local resources. Islington Safeguarding Children Board has negotiated funding for this post until April 2008.

### **Lambeth**

Lambeth Safeguarding Children Board and Lambeth Council are approaching local communities and faith groups as follows:

- Lambeth Safeguarding Children Board currently runs a half-day training for faith groups;
- Lambeth Safeguarding Children Board has a draft child protection policy for faith groups accessible from the Board's website.
- Lambeth Council has appointed a dedicated full-time Faith Group Co-ordinator whose role is to work with faith groups in the Borough:
  - Providing general support;
  - Encouraging community cohesion among the faith communities; and
  - Building the capacity of organisations to deliver their services better.
- The Faith Group Co-ordinator has made strong links with the faith groups locally.
- Lambeth Council produces a Faith in Lambeth newsletter quarterly
- The Council has a Faith Group's webpage

### **Merton**

Merton Safeguarding Children Board was able to identify the best approach for communicating with and reaching faith leaders by making links with the Merton Inter-Faith Forum, which is facilitated by the borough's Chief Executive. A questionnaire was sent to a significant number of faith groups last year to get feedback on whether they had introduced a child protection policy and whether they would like training organised.

This was followed up by a half-day conference early this year, which was attended by 30 faith or community group representatives and various key partner agencies. Speakers at the conference included the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service, Muslim leaders, a London-based professional working with African families and a local pastor, and many of the

delegates welcomed the opportunity for dialogue regarding a range of complex issues that affect faith and community groups.

Merton Safeguarding Children Board have developed an action plan following this event, which includes further opportunities for training, making resources available and the possibility of an annual conference.

Making contact with the diverse range of faith leaders remains a challenge as there are many independent groups (some of them new) which are not necessarily affiliated to any umbrella organisation. The Merton Safeguarding Children Board's aim is to encourage every faith group to have a 'safeguarding children policy' in place, which is regularly monitored and reviewed and covers:

- What to do if you are worried about a child, including local referral arrangements;
- What is harmful to children;
- Safe practice when working with children;
- Safe practice for certain spiritual practices, such as praying for children;
- Safe recruitment and supervision of staff and volunteers (including using the new Vetting and Barring Scheme when implemented);
- Dealing with situations where adults who may be a risk to children attend a faith group;
- Details of a designated lead person for child protection in each faith group.

### **Newham**

Newham was one of the boroughs involved in the Community Partnership Project. The Newham CPA's work has been so successful that the post has been extended to the end of March 2008. The adviser has worked extensively with faith and community groups in the borough alongside Newham Safeguarding Children Board Child Protection in Diverse Communities Sub-group. The Newham Safeguarding Children Board Development Officer also works with community groups around child protection procedures and runs workshops.

### **Waltham Forest**

The Waltham Forest Safeguarding Children Board is working with a child protection consultant to develop a strategy addressing the diverse needs of local faith communities in Waltham Forest.

The Waltham Forest Safeguarding Children Board is currently undertaking a mapping exercise and establishing links with faith communities already known and established, as well as identifying less known (or unknown) Faith communities in the borough of Waltham Forest. To:

- Have a directory of the faith groups;
- Be in contact with as many faith groups as possible;
- Deliver basic information and raising awareness about safeguarding children relevant to working with diverse faith groups;
- Facilitate faith group meetings (single and multi-faith) to reduce isolation, and exchange ideas and experiences;
- Respond to any new issues that emerge e.g. the identification of a 'new' community and a specific practice that needs addressing; and
- Identify obstacles or aids to safeguarding children within faith communities.

Waltham Forest Safeguarding Children Board intends this exercise to culminate in a report which will be the baseline for developing a robust strategy with clear and deliverable aims and objectives. This will be an inclusive process ensuring broad and meaningful faith communities' participation in order to maintain the momentum and strength of this project. It will support appropriate decision-making, including about how a strategy for future work should be resourced.

### **Wandsworth**

Closer working with faith groups is one of the main priorities of Wandsworth Safeguarding Children Board, and one of the first tasks of the Board's newly appointed Development Officer was to request meetings with a variety of faith groups to discuss the safeguarding agenda and its impact on their practice. This resulted in meetings with a number of individual faith groups, including the local Inter-faith Forum, and the initial response has been extremely positive – although the Wandsworth Safeguarding Children Board acknowledges that there is still a long way to go. A particularly useful contact has been with a local Muslim community group, which is very well established and keen to help the Wandsworth Safeguarding Children Board to start a dialogue with their community on various issues of safeguarding.

The Wandsworth Safeguarding Children Board also plans to link with existing contacts with various faith groups and communities, such as the police's good links with the Muslim community, although this initial set up work is proving time consuming in the context of the vast volume of the Safeguarding Children Board's work.

### **Tower Hamlets**

The Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Children Board has been working with the range of communities for more than 10 years. Key features of the workplan include:

- A Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Children Board Sub-group –Engaging with our Communities. The Sub-group's remit it is to work closely with the different communities in Tower Hamlets;
- Two working-groups report to the Sub-group – the Working with Muslim Families and the Faith and Third Sector Working-groups. The Child Protection and Reviewing Service Manager who supervises the Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Children Board Development Officer, also supervises the Co-ordinator of the African Families Service.

The Safeguarding Children Board works with Muslim families as follows:

- A range of thematic workshops delivered to the community from an Islamic perspective to promote joint work with children services and the community;
- Conference entitled: Child Protection / Safeguarding Children and the Impact of Domestic Violence – specifically targeting the Imams in East London;
- A Mosque and Madressah's Safeguarding Children Handbook;
- Safeguarding training for Arabic teachers and a guidance leaflet for parents assisting them in their choice of Islamic teachers;
- Awareness raising of safeguarding issues via the media which includes attending and participating in the phone-in sessions during the period of Ramamdan;
- Develop the Islamic perspective page on the Safeguarding Children Board website;

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- Continuing to review and develop Tower Hamlet's protocols on forced marriage and deliver a range of workshops in conjunction with the Domestic Violence unit to raise awareness;
- Appointing a Muslim Safeguarding Children Social Worker who attends the Sub-group and participates in a number of other Safeguarding Children Board Sub-groups to raise awareness around the Islamic perspective;
- Safeguarding children training provided by the department for Arabic teachers and tutors.

### The Safeguarding Children Board's Faith and Third Sector Sub-group:

- Assists and advises on training activities and the implementation of the Common Core strategy within the Faith and Third Sector;
- Organises and delivers a half-day seminars on Safeguarding children;
- Provides a forum for members of the Faith and Third Sector communities to communicate with the statutory services and share knowledge;
- Works directly with the Somali Development Officer in raising awareness around safeguarding children issues and in particular, female genital mutilation;
- Work with the Somali mosque in raising awareness around safeguarding children issues.

### The Safeguarding Children Board's work with the African and African Caribbean Communities includes:

- Working with the African Families Service (AFS) Co-ordinator to safeguard children;
- Having the Co-ordinator as a Sub-group member to raise awareness and represent the community;
- Participating in the AFS steering group;
- Being actively involved in the planning and delivery of seminars for Pastors and community leaders – themes include:
  - Safeguarding Children and the role of Pastors and community leaders
  - Private Fostering
  - Spirit Possession
  - Immigration issues and the impact on Safeguarding children



**London  
safeguarding  
children board**

A joint initiative by:  
NHS London  
Metropolitan Police Service  
London Directors of Children's Services  
Chairs of London LSCBs  
London Probation Service  
London Councils