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PRESS RELEASE

**WALTHAM FOREST FAMILIES HIT BY CUTS TO
HEALTH VISITING SERVICE**

'Another Victoria Climbié could happen', say Unite/CPHVA

The health of families in Waltham Forest, North East London, is being adversely hit by a 40% cut to the health visiting workforce in the last eight years.

Unite/the Community Practitioners' and Health Visitors' Association believes that 'another Victoria Climbié is on the cards' as there are not enough health visitors available to ensure safe practice as required by the Nursing and Midwifery Council's Professional Code of Conduct (NMC).

Health visitors in the borough have identified cases of rickets, degenerative neurological conditions, poor diet, immunisations of babies being missed, and postnatal depression that have not been picked up soon enough because of the lack of health visitors.

Waltham Forest Primary Care Trust (PCT) has been accused of 'salami tactics' of frozen posts to whittle away the number of PCT-funded health visitors from 43.6 whole time equivalents (WTE) in 2000 to 30.1 (WTE) in 2007 to the current 26.1 (WTE) - a drop of 39.7% since 2000.

The crisis is set against a backdrop of a borough with a highly mobile population living in a large rented property sector. There is also an increasing birth rate with about 4,500 'live' births in 2007, up several hundred on the previous year.

Now Unite/CPHVA is calling for urgent talks with the trust's Chief Executive, Sally Gorham – who earns at least £110,000 a year – in a bid to restore the number of health visitors to the 2002 figure of 35 WTE.

The health visitors said that they face ‘a double whammy’ – not only dealing with cuts in staffing – but the demands of controversial management consultants, Meridian Productivity, whose staff, it is understood, are not clinicians and therefore don’t fully understand the role of health visitors. Health visitors say it is a purely ‘a number crunching’ exercise, with no qualitative analysis of the borough’s current and future needs.

An example of the depth of the crisis is the decline in the once-universal eight month review since 2006, so that now only children on the child protection register and those on the family support system for vulnerable families receive this service.

But Unite/CPHVA understands that 40% of those on this family support system have not been seen within the target date.

There are 23 ‘open child health clinics’ for children under five within the trust’s area, but the demand is such that there is ‘standing room only’ in some clinics.

School nurses have been cut by a third in the last year – from 10.4 WTE in at the start of 2007 to a present figure of 6.8 WTE, despite it being government policy that every secondary school and cluster of primary schools will have a school nurse by 2010.

Unite Head of Health, Kevin Coyne said: ‘It is clear this is a PCT in crisis when it comes to providing community nursing services to its growing population. We call for immediate talks to reverse this appalling situation and the end of the lack of openness and transparency that has dogged this trust for a considerable time.’

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NOTES TO NEWS EDITORS:

- Victoria Climbié died in 2000, aged eight, after being tortured by her great aunt and her boyfriend. This resulted in the Lord Laming inquiry
- In a slick brochure produced by The NHS Confederation last year, the employers’ organisation, entitled *Management in the NHS: the facts*, the trust’s Chief Executive, Sally Gorham, who has nearly 30 years NHS experience, said: ‘*Most importantly, my role directly improves patient care.*’
- In 2006, strong local campaigning resulted in the PCT’s board voting against management proposals to cut up to 20 health visitor and school nurse posts. The board said that the proposed changes would not be in the long term interests of patient/client care.
- Ms Gorham’s salary is from the 2006/7 trust annual report which says that her pay band was between £110-115,000 a year.

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Unite/CPHVA press releases can be seen on the CPHVA website:

www.unitetheunion.com/cphva

Unite (Amicus section) is the third largest union in the NHS. It has seven professional sections: the Community Practitioners' and Health Visitors' Association, the Mental Health Nurses Association, the Guild of Healthcare Pharmacists, the Society of Sexual Health Advisers, the Medical Practitioners' Union, College of Healthcare Chaplains, and the Hospital Physicists Association.

Unite was formed by an amalgamation of Amicus and the Transport and General Workers' Union in May 2007.