

Report of the Assistant Director (Children's Specialist Services) to the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel to be held on 22 April 2015

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Subject:

Children Missing from Care 2014-2015

Summary statement:

This report considers the data and performance of the system for responding to children who run away or go missing from care. The report makes reference to the National Guidance for Local Authorities responding to missing children.

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1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report considers the data and performance of the system for responding to children who run away or go missing from care. The report makes reference to the National Guidance for Local Authorities responding to missing children.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 This report will refer to the national guidance for agencies tasked to assist missing young people and then looks at the statistics around the performance of the multi-agency network that is responding to these children in Bradford.
- 2.2 The reasons that children go missing are often complex and will involve a number of “push” or “pull” factors. That is why each missing incident needs to be understood within the context of a young person’s views, feelings and experiences.

3. REPORT ISSUES

3.1 The National Context

- 3.1.1 The National Guidance for responding to missing children was updated and re-issued in January 2014. “**Statutory Guidance on Children who run away or go missing from home or care,**” defines the roles and responsibilities of those agencies active in this field including Local Authorities, Local Safeguarding Children’s Boards, multi-agency partners (Police, Health etc) and the Voluntary Sector.
- 3.1.2 The Guidance maintains that there are no reliable national figures for the number of children who go missing or run away, but estimates suggest that the figure is in the region of 100,000 per year. (Children’s Society, 2011). Children may run away from a problem, such as abuse or neglect at home, or to be somewhere they find more attractive than home or care for example contact with family or friends that they are not allowed to see. They may have been coerced to run away by peers or adults seeking to exploit them. Whatever the reason, it is estimated that approximately 25 per cent of children and young people who go missing are at risk of serious harm (ibid).
- 3.1.3 According to the Guidance, all Local Authorities must agree a protocol with the local Police service to determine the response to children who runaway or go missing from home or care. This protocol should include neighbouring authorities to avoid boundary conflict as to who should respond to a child. Bradford has had a protocol in place for a considerable time and over the past year it has been revised and updated. The new document is currently being launched and is in the process of being added to safeguarding procedures. It provides a clear definition of terms, details the risk assessment that is required should a child be missing and what should be happening when a child returns having been away. It is a detailed and useful document.

3.1.4 There is a clear duty in the National Guidance to actively listen to children’s experiences, to gain an understanding of their needs and understand the factors that made them go missing in order to prevent future missing episodes. Bradford’s professional network is set up to do this.

3.2 Missing in Bradford

3.2.1 The primary source of statistics for children who are missing is the Police. All children who are reported missing are included on a database that reflects the missing statistics for the whole year.

3.2.2 The system for responding to missing children has not changed substantially in terms of the agencies involved and their professional linkages since last year but there have been developments and a growth in resources. Additional Police staff have been provided both to oversee missing cases and to work directly with children’s residential units. This arrangement has provided a significantly improved response where the Police Officers involved with a Children’s Home have been able to identify a missing young person, having previously met and spoken with them, and used Police knowledge of the local area to determine where they might go missing and as a result been able to recover them.

3.2.3 The filtering and processing of the missing referrals to the Police is carried out by Barnardo’s Turnaround service. Barnardo’s filter the missing reports and check against available records to determine if there is already any Children’s Specialist Services (CSS) involvement. Any acute safeguarding issues should already have been picked up by Police officers responding to the child or young person having returned however if there are still such concerns then referral will be made to Social Care.

3.2.4 Children will be referred on for appropriate follow up from a range of agencies including Prospects, The Hand in Hand Project (Childrens’ Society), and Turnaround Project itself. All of the children missing in 2014/15 received follow up to establish the reason for them going missing and to try to prevent further episodes.

3.3 Missing Data 2014-15

3.3.1 For all children missing from care, there is a contract with VoiceAbility an independent advocacy service to provide return interviews. This is to ensure that there is an understanding of the reasons that led to the child going missing and to assist in planning to prevent repeat episodes. The figures for the year’s involvement are given below.

2014/15	Number of Referrals received	Number of interviews offered	Number of interviews carried out	Non Eligible referrals
TOTALS	120	54	31	65

3.3.2 According to the terms of the commissioning agreement, VoiceAbility are obliged to offer interviews to any child who has been missing for more than 24 hours and in cases where the child has been missing for less time there is the facility to

provide an interview with the agreement of Children's Services. The 31 interviews involved 25 different young people in 6 cases they had run away on multiple occasions. Young people say in return interviews that the main reason they run away is that they are unhappy and want to see their family.

3.4 Links to the CSE Hub

3.4.1 There is now considerable evidence that co-locating professionals from key-agencies is effective in sharing information, planning and acting to protect children and young people and in securing evidence to prosecute offenders. Bradford has learned from other Authorities in the development of its own multi-agency co-located team.

3.4.2 The team, known as "the Hub", is a single point of contact for all agencies to refer concerns they have about children who may be at risk or to share information about potential offenders. The main focus of the team is to reduce the threat and risk to the victim. This is achieved by having a multi-agency personalised plan for every child at risk. The plans have a specific focus on safeguarding and identifying children who are missing.

3.4.3 The co-location of the key partners including the Police, Children's Specialist Services, Voluntary Sector Service (eg Barnardo's, BLAST) and Health allows for the flow of information to build up a comprehensive risk assessment of child and the creation of a plan to safeguard them.

3.5 Oversight by the Quarterly Missing Meeting

3.5.1 The quarterly missing meeting involves representatives from all of the key agencies working to safeguard missing children including Children's Specialist Services, the Police, the Children's Homes, Barnardo's Turnaround Project, Education Social Work, the Children's society Hand in Hand Project and Prospects.

3.5.2 This meeting was held regularly throughout 2014/15 and was used to allow the agencies to raise issues around service delivery. It also has taken on the role of reviewing a sample of cases from the missing return to look at case management and the outcomes for children.

3.5.3 In the last quarter Turnaround project have designated specific staff to look at the overall missing return to analyse it for trends and indications as to how best to address the problem in future. It should also be noted that missing figures will now be included in the Bradford Safeguarding Children Board's Multi-agency Performance Dataset which will ensure that there is increased monitoring of this issue.

3.6 Ofsted Inspection of Missing Arrangements

3.6.1 During the inspection of Bradford Metropolitan District Council services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, Ofsted 2014 the Inspectors found;

Good, effective systems ensure that missing and trafficked children are identified

and that risks become promptly understood and minimised ... Children missing from home are routinely discussed at the CSE Hub and their situations assessed to identify their vulnerability to exploitation while they are missing.”

3.6.2 There are sound links between the key agencies working to safeguard children going missing in Bradford. The collocation of a number of service as part of the CSE Hub has had a major benefit in that it allows the agencies to pick up on children going missing and make a judgement early on as to whether there child sexual exploitation issues that need a response.

3.6.3 All of the children who were reported as missing to the police in the past year received a follow up response ranging from a letter to the family home offering support and advice to a full blown Team Around the Child (TAC) planning process.

4. OPTIONS

4.1 The options are covered in the recommendations below in 6.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

5.1 The system for responding to missing children is a central feature for keeping children in the district safe.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 That the work being undertaken by the multi-agency team to safeguard children going missing in Bradford be endorsed.

6.2 That the multi-agency team be requested to organise a specific event during Children’s Safeguarding Week to highlight the risks around going missing in Bradford.

6.3 That the multi-agency team be involved in updating the e-learning package on missing children, in the light of updated guidance and the new Missing Protocol.

6.4 That the multi-agency team be requested to continue to analyse samples from the Missing Return and to ensure that any learning points are disseminated to Children’s Services.

7. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None.

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

None.

9. APPENDICES

None.