

Report of the Deputy Director (Children's Social Care) to the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 7th December 2016

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Subject:

Children Missing from Care

Summary statement:

The report highlights the work being undertaken in Bradford to prevent children being missing from care the actions taken to protect young people when they do go missing and the provision that is in place to meet their needs.

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Portfolio:

Education, Employment and Skills

Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Children's Services

Summary

1.1 This report considers the activity and performance of the system responding to children who run away or go missing from care. The report makes reference to the Statutory Guidance on Children who run away or go missing from home or care (January 2014) and the West Yorkshire Police Joint protocol for Children Missing from Home or Care (February 2015).

2 Background

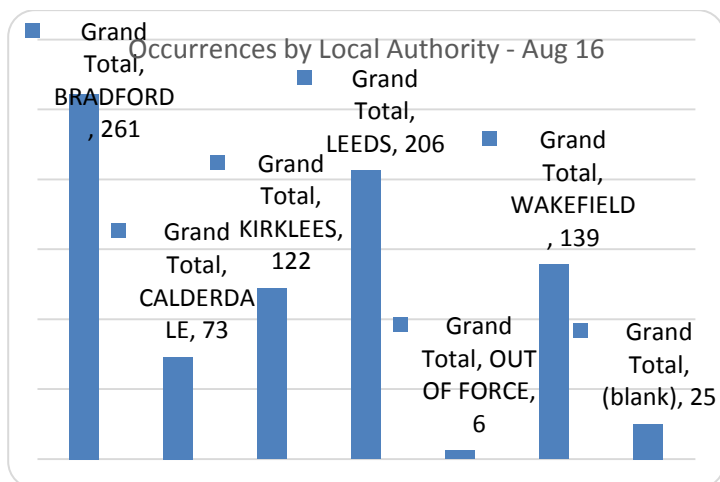
2.1 There has been a concerted effort over the last 12 months across partners to improve our local arrangements for children missing from care. We are now in a much stronger position to prevent, protect and ensure there is the correct level of provision in place to address the issue.

2.2 A draft Missing Children Multi – Agency Strategy and Action Plan has been developed which outlines the activity in this area and which will be performance managed by the Bradford Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB). This will be tabled with the CSE sub group of the BSCB in December.

2.3 Nationally in the year 2015/16 32, Police Forces reported 44,189 incidents of missing relating to 9,367 children. Of these, it is reported that children in care were responsible for 88% across 29 forces.

2.4 Between the 1st April 2016 and 30th June 2016, there were 692 missing episodes in relation to 290 individual children recorded on LCS (Liquid Children’s Service System). This includes 357 occurrences that are reporting CLA (children looked after) missing from home, these occurrences relate to 62 individual children. Locally children in care are responsible for 50% of missing events.

2.5 Bradford reports a higher number of missing events than its neighbouring West Yorkshire authorities, and the least number of absent. This has been a positive decision to ensure that all children with an additional flag of risk receive a proactive response.



3 Report issues

Prevention

- 3.1 The Joint Protocol for Children Missing from Home or Care and the Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care has been reviewed with staff teams and expectation set. An audit of case files of young people who have been missing has taken place twice over the last six months, this has highlighted improved practice.
- 3.2 A Police data analyst has been in post since March to provide intelligence in relation to CSE. This directly links to missing, and a Missing Co-ordinator has been in post since May working within Children's Social Care and located within the Hub. These two posts have proved invaluable in ensuring we have an accurate picture of missing children and a rigorous response. The Missing Co-ordinator and Police Missing Officer support children's home staff in ensuring that all young people have an agreed reporting strategy in place. After a missing incident, the Co-ordinator contacts the placement to discuss the issues and see what has been put in place to prevent a re-occurrence.
- 3.3 The Missing Co-ordinator role within Children's Social Care is a new post. This innovation has created greater understanding of missing incidents and the activity of social work and care staff to improve the situation. The Co-ordinator reviews all missing incidents and ensures that agreed protocols have been followed. They work with placements, review reporting strategies and assist in training of staff members on our local procedures and protocols. The Co-ordinator provides a weekly strategic report of missing events that is shared at a senior level. This provides assurance that procedure is being followed.
- 3.4 All children who go missing are offered a return to home interview within 72 hours. This is currently commissioned to Voiceability. Voiceability report that 32% of young people who are looked after receive a return to home interview within 72 hours. If the interview is refused, there is an expectation that the young person will be visited by their Social Worker within 24 hours and a conversation will take place with the young person by the trusted adult in the home. Information ascertained from return to home interviews is shared with the Police as a safeguarding measure.
- 3.5 For children missing who are not looked after, 98% receive a return to home interview within 72 hours, this activity has been proactively managed by the Placement Support Service. The detail from the interview is shared with the Police. By actively listening to young people, further incidents are reduced and referrals for service are made where this is necessary.
- 3.6 We have improved our arrangements significantly in relation to seeing young people after a missing occurrence, listening to them and acting on what they have said to prevent re-occurrence.

- 3.7 Currently there are 330 children from other Local Authorities placed in Bradford across a number of settings. The majority 295 are in a fostering situation. Links have been developed with the four private homes in Bradford to ensure that they follow the local reporting arrangements around missing. When a child is placed in Bradford by another Authority they notify us in writing. If there are additional risks this is highlighted and passed to the relevant team.
- 3.8 Where a young person has been missing from a foster placement there is an expectation that a meeting takes place involving the child's Social Worker, the Supervising Social Worker and the Foster Carer to ensure the issues are discussed and a protective plan put in place.
- 3.9 There is a good link between the CSE Hub and missing agenda. The teams are co-located and consider the issues at both daily meetings and at a monthly missing exploited meeting chaired by the Police.
- 3.10 Multi agency training has been delivered throughout the Summer of 2016. Over 300 staff attended full day sessions addressing the risks and dangers of missing. The missing policy and protocol was agreed and shared on Council websites.

Protection

- 3.10 A multi agency approach to information sharing has been established. This includes a daily meeting, weekly strategic meetings looking at the top 5 young people who have been missing and a quarterly Strategic Partnership Meeting is in place that will monitor the multi-agency strategy and ensure there is a joined up approach to the issue. A report is provided on a weekly basis to the Chief Executive, Director of Children's Services and Chief Superintendent and other Senior Managers showing the activity to support the most vulnerable young people who have been missing in the week.
- 3.11 The current systems ensure there is an escalation policy in place and appropriate challenge across partners. This has led to improved practice and information sharing.
- 3.12 Systems have been established to ensure that all agencies are informed effectively of a missing event. This triggers the appropriate follow up action within service to support the placement and young people.
- 3.13 A number of young people have had their internal placement disrupted to prevent further missing incidents. This has led to either an internal move or a move to an external placement. Where we place out of Bradford a conversation takes place with the local Police Missing Co-ordinator and Placements Team prior to placement. For a number of young people this had proved to be a positive move with the number of missing incidents reducing or even ending. The local push and pull factors to missing being no longer in place.
- 3.14 There is an expectation across residential staff that they will prevent a young person leaving the home if immediate risk is apparent and that they will go looking for young people if they have failed to return to the home. Cars have been leased to support

this activity. Staff will remain in contact with young people and, where possible, we will prevent recording as missing. All missing incidents are reviewed if a home hasn't followed the agreed expectations this will be challenged.

- 3.15 If a child living in a Children's home is recorded as high risk, they would have a reporting strategy in place jointly agreed with the Police and be reported missing almost immediately. This would also involve the setting up of a Special Operations Room led by a Detective Inspector to lead and co-ordinate the investigation. Senior Police leaders in Bradford have been very focused on ensuring that these children are prioritised when they go missing and all staff and managers have received several training inputs and briefings regarding Missing persons. This approach in Bradford does mean we have higher levels of recorded missing children, however, we agree this is the correct approach to assuring we are doing all we can to safeguard young people.

Provision

- 3.16 We have revisited and re-launched our training, policies and procedures regarding missing incidents to ensure that all staff involved understand the expectations of them to support and safeguard young people in Bradford.
- 3.17 We are auditing our missing cases and bringing challenge to workers who have not followed the agreed procedure and protocols.
- 3.18 We are revising our local placement and training offer to staff, this includes signs of safety training and PACE training linked to improving the relationship between carers and the young people. This will lead to improved care setting for young people and reduce the push pull factors linked with missing.
- 3.19 We have revised our children's home offer in Bradford to provide smaller homes, they have reduced from 8 beds to 6, and by investing in the environment we are now providing a more homely setting to support young people who have been through challenging times.
- 3.20 We have worked as a partnership to ensure that we are ready for inspection either via a Joint Targeted Area Inspection or Single Inspection from Ofsted. Both frameworks will look to see if strong partnership arrangements are in place in the Local Authority. We have made great strides in the last 12 months being involved in leading regional training events and peer inspection. We have confidence that this has put the Authority and partnership in a stronger position.

4 Options

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

5 Contribution to Corporate Priorities

- 5.1 The system for responding to missing children is a central feature for keeping looked after children in the district safe. There is a direct link between children who go

missing and being vulnerable to being either the victim or perpetrator of crime. By improving our local partnership response we will see a reduction in the number of times children who are looked after become involved in criminal justice system.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 That the work being undertaken to safeguard looked after children who go missing in Bradford be endorsed.
- 6.2 That the Multi-Agency Strategy to safeguard children who go missing be supported and reported to elected members on a yearly basis.

7 Background Documents

- 7.1 None.

8 Not for Publication Documents

- 8.1 None.

9 Appendices

- 9.1 Missing Children - Multi–Agency Strategy 2016–2018, Working together to Safeguard Children going missing from Home & Care in Bradford.