

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 13th December 2017

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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

1 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 The Director of Children Service launched the imperatives on the 12th June 2017. One of the key imperatives being:

- reduce the number of children or young people who had a missing or absent incident during the previous 12 months.

This report will highlight the work that is being undertaken to achieve this desired outcome.

- 2.2 There has been a concerted effort over the last 24 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. A new Police Superintendent Alisa Newman is in post as children's safeguarding lead.
- 2.3 A Missing Children Multi – Agency Strategy and Action Plan 2016-18 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. The Strategy and Action Plan is attached as an appendix to this report.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 Between the 1st April 2017 and 30th September 2017, there were 1290 missing Incidents in relation to 522 individual children recorded on LCS (Local Children's System). This includes 568 incidents that are reporting CLA (children looked after) missing from home, these incidents relate to 104 individual children. Locally children in care are responsible for 44% of missing incidents.
- 2.6 The table below compares the number of missing incidents and children in Apr-Sept 2017 to the previous year;

	1 Apr - 30 Sept 2016			1 Apr - 30 Sept 2017	
	Episodes	Children		Episodes	Children
Non LAC	669	436		722	428
LAC	472	58		568	104
Grand Total	1141	489		1290	522

The tables below compare the children who were missing by age, gender and ethnicity

	1 Apr - 30 Sept 2016				1 Apr - 30 Sept 2017		
	Male	Female	Unknown		Male	Female	Unknown
Non LAC	236	199	1		247	172	9
LAC	24	34	0		56	48	0

The numbers of male Non LAC going missing has increased slightly and the numbers of females decreasing compared to 2016. However, the numbers of CLA missing by gender has increased with a significant increase in the males which has more than doubled compared to 2016.

	1 Apr - 30 Sept 2016			1 Apr - 30 Sept 2017	
	Non Lac	LAC		Non Lac	Lac
0-4	28	0		15	0
5-9	53	2		44	4
10-15	256	35		263	59
16+	98	21		95	41
Blank	1	0		11	0

The age groups of Non LAC going missing has seen a slight fall in most age group compared to 2016; however there was a slight increase in the 10-15 age group who went missing.

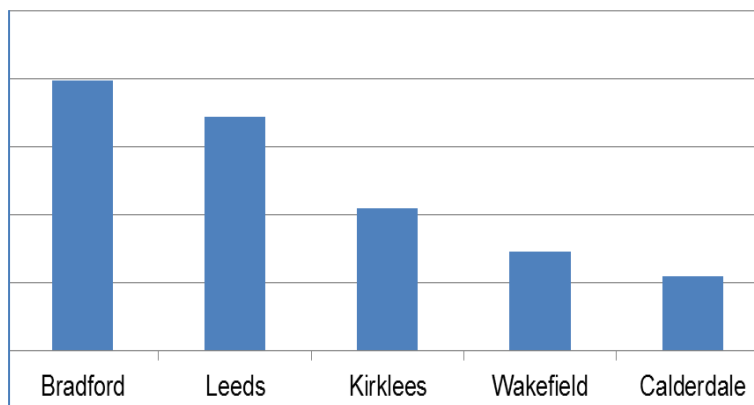
The age group of CLA missing has seen an increase in all groups compared to 2016.

Of the 522 children with a missing incident during 1 Apr – 30 Sept 2017 there were 118 with 3 or more incidents (23%). This is an increase on the previous year when it was 71 children (15%).

Bradford reports a higher number of missing incidents than its neighbouring West Yorkshire authorities, and the least number of absent. The graph below highlights the current performance around reporting of missing and absent across the West Yorkshire region. Bradford has the lowest level of absent and the highest number of missing both medium and high risk, this is strong evidence that there is a robust partnership approach to missing in the district and this is understood across both the Police force and our placements. All missing incidents are reviewed and reporting strategies are in place that are adhered to. These are subject to regular review and discussed at operational meetings.

	Leeds	Wakefield	Kirklees	Calderdale	Bradford	West Yorkshire
Absent	20.8%	26.9%	40.1%	39.0%	12.0%	23.5%
Misper Low	10.7%	10.9%	9.1%	11.0%	7.4%	9.6%
Misper Med	53.1%	47.2%	39.2%	36.0%	61.9%	51.2%
Misper High	15.3%	15.0%	11.6%	14.0%	18.9%	15.7%

Incidents by Local Authority 1 Apr – 30 Sept 2017



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. The missing coordinator scrutinises recording on LCS to ensure that procedure is followed.
- 3.2 The data analyst post in this area is currently vacant; however we continue to receive good quality information which is linked directly to the Missing Co-ordinator within social care and the Police missing coordinator. Recruitment to the post is underway. 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 -coordinator role has been in place for over 18 months. 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 24 hours. For children that are looked after we currently commission Voiceability to carry out this function. Voiceability report that 60% of young people who are looked after receive a return to home interview within 72 hours as per guidance. If the interview is refused or the young person is unavailable then voiceability will record this. 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. If a young person is a persistent missing person the Social Worker will contact the home via telephone and speak to the young person. It is important in all cases that the young persons voice is captured as to why the incident took place. 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, 95% receive a return to home interview within 72 hours; this activity is being proactively managed by a dedicated missing social care team within the initial assessment team. 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 396 children from other Local Authorities placed in Bradford across a number of settings. The majority 336 are in a fostering situation. Links have been developed with the 8 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 have a statutory duty to notify us in writing. If there are additional risks this is highlighted and passed to the relevant team. If it becomes apparent that a Local Authority failed to share information of the arrival the Local Authority is challenged about future information sharing to the relevant Head of Service.
- 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 In November 2017 Bradford Social Care and West Yorkshire Police are running a number of workshops to ensure new and experienced workers are clear about the expectations around missing children.
- 3.11 The Children Looked After Restorative Protocol has been reviewed to include the updated West Yorkshire Police Missing procedures and has been shared with service during November.

Protection

- 3.12 A multi agency approach to information sharing has been established. This includes a daily meeting, fortnightly strategic meetings looking at the current 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.
- 3.13 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.
- 3.14 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.
- 3.15 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.
- 3.16 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 bought and placed at each children's home 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. At Ofsted key inspection and independent regulation 44 inspections of children's homes, the response to missing is always looked at in detail to ensure procedures have been followed. Where this is not the case the matter is escalated to the responsible individual to ensure remedial actions are carried out..

- 3.17 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

- 3.18 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.
- 3.19 We are auditing our missing cases and bringing challenge to workers who have not followed the agreed procedure and protocols.
- 3.20 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.
- 3.21 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.
- 3.22 We have worked as a partnership to ensure that we are ready for inspection either Single Inspection Framework or Inspection of Local Authority Children Service by 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 24 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 welcomed.
- 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 **APPENDIX 1** - Missing Children - Multi–Agency Strategy 2016–2018, Working together to Safeguard Children going Missing from Home & Care in Bradford.