

# **Report of the Interim Strategic Director (Children's Services) to the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2018**

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**Subject:**

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## **CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME AND CARE**

### **Summary statement:**

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

The report covers the period April 2017 to October 2018.

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**Portfolio:**

Children's Services

**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 home or 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 This report will consider children and young people who are recorded as absent or missing both those not in care and those who are looked after. The overall numbers of missing recordings will at time include children who are not at risk but are in fact absent. For example parents and carers whose children are late home, or are unaware of their present location may contact police to report their children as missing. The police continue to work with children's services and across West Yorkshire to reduce the number of 'miss-reported' missing incidents.
- 2.2 Data for the West Yorkshire region (most recent aggregated full year data) shows that for the 12 months (01/04/2017 – 31/03/2018) West Yorkshire Police report that there were 21,402 recorded Missing Persons occurrences. . This covers both adults and children and represents an increase of 5.5% compared to the 20,291 recorded in the previous twelve months (Apr '16 – Mar '17).
- 2.3 There has been a concerted effort over the last 24 months across partners to improve our local arrangements for children missing from home and 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.

### **Children Looked After**

- 2.4 Between September 2017 and March 2018 there were 740 missing episodes involving 98 individual looked after children living in Bradford (including those looked after by other authorities and placed in Bradford). Over the last six months from April 2018 to October 2018 there have been 609 episodes involving 58 individual young people. This is reduction in missing episodes in the last 6 months of 18.1% and of individual young people going missing of 40%.
- 2.5 This would suggest that the revised reporting arrangements put in place within our Emergency Duty team (EDT) and Social Worker (SW) triage which is described later in the report is having an impact.
- 2.6 There is a 20.9% average increase of missing children occurrences over the summer months. It is a well documented national trend that missing incidents increase over the summer months (warmer lighter evenings being part of the pull factor) and Bradford has similarly experienced an increase in missing over the last two summer periods.

2.7 The vast majority of missing incidents involve children and young people who are between the ages of 10 – 17 the graph below indicates that the majority are 16 – 17 years of age.

April 18 - Oct 18		%
0-1	0	0
1-4	0	0
5-9	0	0
10-15	250	41
16-17	357	58.7
	609	100

In the same period there has been a 39% decrease in female children who are looked after (CLA) going missing and an increase of 14% in male CLA going missing. We have taken proactive measures in this period to move young people when it has been felt necessary to break a cycle of behaviour, this will account for the reduction to the female missing figure.

The vast majority of missing incidents involve White British CLA 57% with the next highest group being mixed White / Asian at 14.9%.

### **Children Missing from Home**

2.8 In regard to children who are not looked after and have been reported (usually by parents or carers) as missing from home, between September 2017 and March 2018 there were 1003 missing episodes involving 540 individual young people. Over the last six months from April 2018 to October 2018 there have been 1109 episodes involving 394 individual young people. This is an increase in missing episodes in the last 6 months of 11.2%. However this is also a decrease of individual young people going missing by 27%.

In the same period there has been a 10% increase in episodes of females going missing and a 14% increase of in episodes of males going missing.

The vast majority of missing incidents involve white British 46% with the next highest group being British Asian / Pakistani at 10.6%.

### **Absent Recording**

2.9 Between September 2017 and March 2018 there were 192 absent episodes involving 43 individual young people, over the last six months from April 2018 to October 2018 there have been 58 episodes involving 28 individual young people. This is reduction in absent episodes in the last 6 months of 70% and of individual young people going absent of 35%.

## Report Issues

### Prevention

- 2.10 A Police data analyst is in post to provide intelligence in relation to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). In May 2016 Bradford introduced a dedicated Missing Co-Ordinator alongside a Police Missing Co-ordinator both of whom are co-located and directly link with the CSE unit within our MASH. . 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.
- 2.11 A Missing Protocol and flowchart is in place (Appendix A), an additional Social worker has been recruited into EDT to cover peak missing hours and works until 2am to provide triage to providers both internal and external who want to report a young person as missing. This post has been key to more accurately risk assessing, recording and responding to missing episodes. Providers out of hours often struggle with managing risk and this approach supports the additional activity to locate and own risk by the carer or carer home staff.
- 2.12 All children who go missing are offered a return to home interview within 72 hours. This is currently commissioned to Advocacy Focus. The provider reports that 99% of young people who are looked after receive a return to home interview within 72 hours. 94% are face to face, 5% are via telephone if placed at distance or if the young person prefers this approach.
- 2.13 The work completed by the Advocacy Focus return to care Coordinator has contributed to a multitude of positive outcomes for CYP such as:
- Reduction and/or eradication of Missing Episodes
  - Reduced substance misuse and/or abstinence
  - Engagement in employment, education and training
  - Engagement in positive and meaningful activities
  - Settlement in placement
  - Increased engagement with other services
  - Reduction of risk taking behaviour
- 2.14 For children missing who are not looked after, 77% receive a return to home interview within 72 hours; this activity has been proactively managed by the missing hub in the MASH. 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. 55 young people refused to engage with a return to home interview.

If a young person has 4 or more missing episodes a multi agency visit to their home takes place.

- 2.15 A missing surgery will commence in January 2019 targeting children and young people who have been missing from home for the first time. This approach was successful in Wakefield and resulted over in only 4 out of 169 young people having another missing occurrence across an 11 month period. This involves a PCSO visiting the home of a first time missing young person to hand deliver a letter inviting them to a meeting at a central Police station. When the young person attends with their parent they are shown a presentation on the impact and potential risks associated with missing where this is appropriate..
- 2.16 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.
- 2.17 Currently there are 423 children from other Local Authorities placed in Bradford across a number of settings. The majority (345) are in a family setting, 52 are in residential and 26 in independent living settings. Links have been developed with the 7 private children's homes and 16+ settings in Bradford to ensure that they follow the local reporting arrangements around missing. When a child is placed in Bradford by another Authority they should notify us in writing. If there are additional risks this is highlighted and passed to the relevant team.
- 2.18 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.
- 2.19 The co-located CSE and Missing hub meet on a daily basis to consider live issues and in addition report to a monthly overview meeting which is chaired by the Police.

## **Protection**

- 2.20 A multi agency approach to information sharing has been established. Escalation and challenge process are in place up to Chief Executive level to ensure that children & young people are safeguarded. The overnight missing report is shared at the daily meeting in the hub; internal escalation takes place across the service to meet young people's needs.
- 2.21 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.
- 2.22 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 children 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.

- 2.23 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 in some circumstances we now no longer need to formally record children as missing. All missing incidents are reviewed if a home hasn't followed the agreed expectations this will be challenged.
- 2.24 If a child living in a Children's home is recorded as high risk, an agreed reporting strategy is put 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**

- 2.25 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.
- 2.26 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.
- 2.27 The internal residential offer now includes three specialist homes, a B Positive Pathways hub home and four mainstream children's homes. The homes are able to call on a psychologist, speech and language therapist and internal Police officers.

It has been reported through analysis of the Police officers working to the DfE Innovation Fund B Positive Pathways (BPP) that there has been a saving of £200K to the West Yorkshire Police force as a direct result in the reduction of missing episodes.

### **3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

None

### **4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL**

None

**5. RISK MANAGEMENT & GOVERNANCE ISSUES**

None

**6. LEGAL APPRAISAL**

None

**7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

None

**7.1 EQUILITY & DIVERSITY**

None

**7.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

None

**7.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS**

None

**7.4 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

None

**7.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT**

None

**7.6 TRADE UNION**

None

**7.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS**

None

**7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING**

7.8.1 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.



## **7.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY ASSESSMENT**

None

## **8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS**

None

## **9. OPTIONS**

9.1 The options are covered in the recommendations below.

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

10.1 That the work being undertaken to safeguard looked after children who go missing in Bradford be received.

## **11. APPENDICES**

11.1 Missing Children's Social Care Protocol and Flowchart

11.2 West Yorkshire Police Missing Protocol

## **12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**