

<h1>BRIEFING</h1>	TO:	Improving Lives
	DATE:	17th September 2019
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	TITLE:	Missing Children: Home, Education and Care and those excluded from school

1. Background

The Purpose of this report is to provide assurance that; Children missing from Care, Home, Education and Children and Young People excluded from schools, are being effectively safeguarded.

The legislative context for children who go missing from home or care is covered in the Statutory guidance on Children Who Go Missing From Home or Care (Jan 2014) under Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970.

This complimented by:

- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)
- The Missing Children and Adults Strategy (2011)
- Child Sexual Exploitation; Definition and a guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation (February 2017)
- The Children Act 1989

For Children Missing from Education:

Section 436(A) of the Education Act requires that Local Authorities make arrangements to establish the identities of children residing in their area who are not registered as receiving suitable education.

The Local Authority has responsibility to ensure that Children Missing from Education (CME) are identified, reported and tracked, so that efforts are robust to locate children and where appropriate, suitable educational providers can be found.

The term CME refers to children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll, and who are not receiving a suitable alternative education. A suitable education can be approved via alternative provision such as home tuition or appropriate Elective Home Education.

The Access to Education Service has responsibility to ensure that protocols are adhered to when a child is known to have left a Rotherham school and the child or a destination

school cannot be tracked. The CME Lead officers, as well as Early Help Attendance Leads, have a responsibility to support schools with the identification of children missing in education and to take appropriate steps to locate the child.

The current process

All children missing from home or care are reported missing by the Police to Rotherham's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). An alert is then sent through to the Missing Team, based within the RMBC EVOLVE Team, to make them aware. Once the young person is returned, a Return Home Interview (RHI) is arranged to explore the push and pull factors around why the young person went missing. This includes exploring any safeguarding concerns. (Appendix 1. Flow Chart)

For those children and young people not known to Social care the process remains the same and consideration is given if a referral is needed to Early Help or Social Care. The vast majority of young people who go missing are known to social care. For example in June 2019 20% of the young people were not known to RMBC with an additional 13% linked to another Local Authority (Appendix 2).

The Return Home Interview, once completed, is shared with their allocated worker so they can develop a bespoke 'Find Me Plan'. This plan includes a Risk Assessment around what 'missing' means for this child or young person and includes key information around friends or family, vulnerabilities to harm or exploitation and what agreed steps need to be taken to support increasing the safety for that child or young person.

For children and young people who go missing more than once the 'Find Me Plan' will be reviewed each time and provides information for the police around;

- Where the child or young person may go
- their known associates and
- what the level of risk may be

If a young person is missing for more than 24 hours or for three episodes in a four week period a multi-agency Strategy Meeting is held, where actions are agreed to find the child or young person. This includes a multiagency review around where any child or young person should be returned to.

Missing Advocates within the EVOLVE service carry out RHIs for all young people placed within a 40 mile radius of Rotherham. This provides a level of consistency for children and young people and where there is a need to commission an alternative agency to carry out a RHI, this is quality assured by the EVOLVE Team Manager.

If a young person is missing overnight and they are subject to a Child Protection Plan (CP) or a Looked After Child (LAC), the Need to know alert system is used. This ensures that senior management, including the Director of Children's Services (DCS) are made aware that children are missing and what steps are being taken to find and return the young person.

To support effective multiagency working and to ensure all elements of missing information are reviewed, there is a weekly Operational Missing Group, chaired by one of the Missing Advocates. This group comprises of CYPS, Police, Health, Education (Children Missing from Home and Education) and the Youth Offending Team. The purpose of the meeting is to ensure that missing cases are reviewed and that action is agreed across the partnership.

The Operational Missing group is overseen by the Strategic Missing Group. This comprises of a group of senior managers from across the council and key partners to meet on a six weekly basis to consider key themes and issues arising in relation to missing activity. This is now being chaired by the Service Manager responsible for EVOLVE, Child Protection and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). This group

also reviews the key messages from the RHIs and seeks to explore any children linked across the missing from home or care, CME or exclusion data sets.

Given the different elements of missing that sit in different services, the Strategic Missing Group ensures that when a child is missing from home, care or education that all relevant services and agencies are aware. Careful consideration is also given as to whether the child or young person is at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) or Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE).

Where there are significant concerns around the level of harm and risk of an individual, a referral to the Multi Agency Vulnerability Panel (MAVP) is made. The MAVP is chaired by the Director of Children's Services, with equivalent representation from across the partnership in attendance. The meeting allows for critical reflection, discussion and agrees actions to ensure there is a robust response agreed to find young people, disrupt any criminal activity, reduce risk and increase safety.

A Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Missing Performance report is shared at the Children & Young People's Services (CYPS) Performance meeting on a bi-monthly basis. This report provides an overview of the recent data and a summary of key themes and areas for development. Chaired by the Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children's Services & Neighbourhood Working, this meeting offers a clear line of sight on Missing Children and young people.

The Children Missing Education (CME) scorecard (Appendix 3) is developed on a quarterly basis and shared with CYPS Departmental Leadership Team (DLT), Education Senior Management Team (ESMT), Access to Education Team and the Strategic and Operational Missing Groups.

Exclusion data (See Appendix 4) is available quarterly and shared with the CYPS DLT, the ESMT, the Virtual School Governing Board, the Strategic Missing Group and Head Teacher Forums.

What's Working Well?

The Missing Team is now on a permanent footing with a dedicated Team Manager. This will support the number of Return Home Interviews being offered increasing from the 2018/ 2019 year end figure of 89%. The aim remains to maintain and improve upon the conversion rate to successful interviews (82%). The team are small, but remain committed to ensuring they continue to work to engage young people in RHIs and will work with other practitioners and the team around the child to support the interview and planning.

There is a Missing from Home and Care Scorecard is produced monthly and provides a clear understanding around our Missing Cohort and identifies patterns and trends. With information from EVOLVE, the Children Missing from Education Team and Elective Home Education, the scorecard allows us to consider different elements of the young person's world and to make sure that information is triangulated to support a more holistic assessment of vulnerability and resilience.

There are strong established links with a range of internal and external partners in relation to CME, in addition to the CYPS internal working arrangements, there are established working links with Council Tax and Housing and external links which include other Local Authorities both Regionally and Nationally, NHS, Benefits Agencies and Border Agencies.

Often the intervention that supports missing reducing is an exploration of the 'push and pull factors', a review of family contact and ensuring that the young person's voice is heard around their care plan and placement. The success in reducing the number of children missing from care reflects this way of working and is becoming increasingly embedded in practitioners' day to day working.

The overall number of young people missing from home or care last year steadily reduced (Appendix 2) due to excellent multiagency partnership working and communication.

There has been clear direction from the Head of Service for Children in Care to residential settings about working with Rotherham to define what missing means for each young person in light of their age and needs using the 'find me plan'. This ensures there is a clear expectation around what role the placement has in identifying and supporting immediate action around issuing episodes.

Due to the level of oversight we have around missing we are easily able to identify the young people who have periods of regular missing. For our looked after population we know there are often a number of repeat incidents and we want to further reduce these repeat episodes.

The system works well when we are told a child is missing from home or care and this can be more of a challenge with children who are placed out of area. The purpose of individualised 'Find Me Plans' is to support making roles and responsibilities clear and visible with residential setting and foster carers out of area.

At the end of the reporting period there were 160 active cases that remained open to CME which highlights a 24% reduction from Quarter One.

There were 166 resolved cases in Quarter Four, which shows a significant increase on Quarter One when 120 cases were resolved in the period. Cases of CME need to remain open until the child is found or until all enquiries have been exhausted and this can mean that cases remain open for extended periods.

In relation to exclusions we currently have the invalidated data for 2018/2019. The data (Appendix 4) reflects a stabilisation in permanent and fixed term exclusions in secondary settings; whilst in primary settings fixed terms exclusions have stabilised, there has however been an increase in permanent exclusions.

More detailed locality information and data continues to be added to the Quarterly Scorecard by Early Help colleagues which details localities across the Early Help 0-19 reach areas and provides a richer picture of the child and young person.

2. Key Issues

2.1 What are we Worried About?

We are currently experiencing a seasonal increase in the number of young people missing as the lighter nights are here and for June this led to a dip in the number of RHIs being completed. (Appendix 2).

After the Looked After population, the largest Missing group is children and young people who are not currently known to services. This is a key group of young people where the Return Home Interview offers a clear opportunity to explore why the young person went missing and to sign post potentially to services to support reducing future missing episodes.

In Quarter Four there were 171 children (from 85 families) classified as new CME referrals which highlights an increase when compared with the previous Quarter (143 children/112 families). Of the 171 children that opened in Quarter Four, 72 children (42.1%) have been known to have previous episodes of CME that were closed, which again shows a declining trend from last quarter. This highlights that some children have recurrent issues with CME. Evidence suggests that this recurrence is largely due to families being transient and then returning to Rotherham intermittently rather than key

concerns related to vulnerability and/or safeguarding issues.

21.3% of children within the CME cohort were eligible for Free School Meals.

85 of the open CME cases at the end of Quarter Four relate to Primary School age children and 75 relate to Secondary School age children, highlighting an even split. This split is consistent with quarters two and three.

The 2018/2019 Year end reporting in relation to young people who went missing reflects that the biggest cohort remains children who are currently Looked After. They account for just over half of all the recorded missing episodes and are more likely to go missing if they live in a placement within 20 miles of their home. They are also more likely to go missing on a repeated basis.

Of the newly identified cases of CME, 39.2% of children were from the Central area of Rotherham at the time of the referral. The Central locality of Rotherham has consistently higher rates of CME and this is largely due to the mobile and transient nature of families living in the central locality and those in particular from Eastern Europe and this is associated with travelling back to, or back and forth from, the country of origin to the UK and also relocation within the UK.

This has a financial impact on both schools and council services due to the additional resource required to support CME. Schools are funded following a census each October and this dictates their 'per capita' spend for the following year. When a school has high numbers of CME that are not present or 'On Roll' at the time of the census they are awarded reduced settlements, only to find that their CME children can return weeks later. This occurrence does not then attract further funding and schools need to work within the finances allocated for the rest of the year.

The majority of children CME were classified by ethnicity as Roma by their parents (44%) and a further 33% were unclassified. Parents do not have to complete ethnicity as a mandatory declaration and many choose not to do so which is their right. Schools report anecdotally that perceived stigma associated with the Roma ethnicity has been reported by some parents as being a reason for declining to provide ethnicity information. Previous negative articles in the national press are potentially associated with this standpoint.

An optional information form regarding ethnicity remains available for completion by parents at the time of application for a school place. An increasing number of applications are now submitted online.

3. Key Actions and Timelines

3.1 Next Steps (What are we going to do about it?)

An Inclusion Performance Scorecard is currently under development and expected to be in place for October 2019. We are able to cross reference child level data with the current Missing Scorecard (Appendix 2). In Quarter 4 of last year the cross referencing of data enabled us to identify that there was one young person excluded from school, who was also known to our Missing service and CSE team.

We continue to work closely with South Yorkshire Police (SYP) to strengthen our joint responses to young people missing out of the Rotherham area. There is a planned joint review in September 2019 for some of our most worried about young people so that we can maximise our response to missing episodes and focus on preventative action. This will culminate in a shared 'Find Me Plan' for each individual young person.

It has also been agreed that the SYP lead on the Regional Missing protocol. The aim

	<p>would be to ensure that the SYP Regional Missing Protocol is in line with the College of Policing recommendations. This will support a consistency of response for young placed within the South Yorkshire region. SYP have commenced this work and a meeting will be arranged in October 2019.</p> <p>An electronic Optional Information form, regarding ethnicity, has been made available for completion by parents at the time of on line application for a school place. However, as ethnicity cannot be asked on an application form when applying for a school place this will remain a supplementary form.</p>
<p>4. Recommendations</p>	
	<p>It is recommended that Elected Members note the current position and progress made in relation to 'missing children'.</p>

APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: Missing from Home and Care flowchart
- Appendix 2: Missing from Home and care Monthly Scorecard
- Appendix 3: Children Missing From Education Scorecard (CME)
- Appendix 4: School Exclusions Data set 2018/2019
- Appendix 5: Missing Governance 2019