

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Corporate Parent Board
2.	Date:	10th April 2014
3.	Title:	Young People Missing from Care
4.	Directorate:	Children and Young people's services

5. Summary

This report informs the corporate parent board of current issues regarding Young People Missing from Care and with a particular focus on Child Sexual Exploitation.

In January 2014 The Department of Education published new statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care

The guidance makes it clear that local authorities are responsible for protecting children whether they go missing from their family home or from local authority care.

The guidance also comments on widespread concerns about children in care being sexually exploited.

6. Recommendations

That corporate parenting group accept this report and note its content.

7. Proposals and Details

- 7.1 The Joint All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Inquiry on Children Who Go Missing from Care and the Office of the Children's Commissioner's inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups each noted that looked after children missing from their placements are particularly vulnerable with children in residential care at particular risk of going missing and vulnerable to sexual and other exploitation.

It is worth noting that although looked after children are particularly vulnerable when they go missing, the majority of children who go missing are not looked after, and go missing from their family home.

DfE guidance has always indicated that local authorities should agree with local police and other partners a protocol for dealing with children who run away or go missing in their area. Where appropriate, they should also have agreed protocols with neighbouring authorities or administrations. The protocols should be agreed and reviewed regularly with all agencies and be scrutinised by the LSCB.

Rotherham's protocol was updated last year to ensure that it is up to date with the revised guidance. It was drafted in consultation with partners including South Yorkshire Police and Safe@last and endorsed by the safeguarding board.

The regional protocol has not been updated. There are plans to redress this by spring 2014.

Structures for managing children who go missing from home and/or care in Rotherham are well organised. There are good working relationships between the local authority and partner agencies and regular meetings to analyse patterns and trends. Latterly there has been some concern regarding the management of cases when children have run away more than once and with the accuracy of reporting. Each of these matters was discussed at the Child Sexual Exploitation Silver Group on 10th February.

The concerns regarding children who run off more than once include;

- i) cost; the cost to South Yorkshire Police has been estimated to be around £1000.00 each time a child is reported missing.
- ii) role of partner agencies; South Yorkshire Police have complained of social care officers not doing enough to prevent missing person issues with children who regularly run off.
- iii) inconsistency in following protocols and guidance, e.g. strategy meetings not held when;

a child/young person is missing for seven days.

a child/young person goes missing three times or more within a one month period.

If the child/young person is subject to a Child Protection Plan and is missing for over 48 hours (a review Child Protection Conference should be convened).

In terms of cost, the only way to manage this is to reduce the numbers of missing persons. Statistics demonstrate that in past two years the number of children reported missing has remained almost static.

January 2012 to January 2013 = 128

January 2013 to January 2014 = 127

This is something that the local partnership will analyse to identify where prevention strategies can be improved.

In terms of the Police perception that social care officers are not doing enough this will continue to be addressed through regular meetings between partners. It is imperative that those working with children who run off are aware of plans for the children and that all can contribute effectively.

The inconsistency concerning protocols and guidance can be explained in that;

- i) new draft guidance was published by the association of Chief Police Officers February 2013 and by the Department of Education January 2014.
- ii) the regional protocol was last published in 2010 and requires urgent review
- iii) there has been a large number of new social care officers many of whom are not familiar with the guidance around missing from care.
- iv) the lead officer with responsibility for missing children for South Yorkshire Police has been on long term sick leave and the role had only recently been replaced.

The inconsistencies will be addressed during April 2014. South Yorkshire Police has not to date implemented the ACPO guidance but plans to do this in April. The regional Protocol is to be reviewed and amended by June 2014.

All previous guidance relating to missing persons will be deleted from the council's website and the officer with lead responsibility missing persons in Rotherham will ensure that the updated guidance is openly available across the borough.

Structures for managing children who go missing from out of borough placements are not so strong. The DfE guidance states that;

If children placed out of their local authority run away, the local protocol should be followed, in addition to complying with other processes that are specified in the policy of the responsible local authority.

There are concerns that providers are not following this guidance. Following discussions with South Yorkshire Police and the Rotherham Placements team, I have written to every provider with firm instructions as to what we require in Rotherham.

7.2 Children missing January to February 2014.

There were 42 missing person reports filled out in February 2014. This relates to 25 children.

9 of the 25 children have never been missing before (36%)

8 of the 25 children haven't been missing in the last 3 months (32%)

8 of the 25 children have been missing in the last 3 months inc.

8 of the 25 children were reported missing on two or more occasions

Most of the children were under the age of 16 (80%)
More than half of all children who were reported missing do not live in local authority care (61%)

The number of children believed to be at risk of sexual exploitation in January and February from this cohort of missing children is;

13 children at medium risk
1 child at high risk

Strategy meetings have been held where CSE is a concern.

There are currently four young females in secure accommodation as a result of CSE concerns.

Safe@last are either working with or are aware of every child reported missing during this period. Not all children have received a return interview with safe@last as there have been some staffing shortages with the team.

7.3 patterns and trends

In February nine children were reported missing who have never previously been reported as missing. Safe@last are to report to the Rotherham Runaways action group on this cohort. The information will be discussed at the next meeting of this group in April.

A public house in Rotherham Town centre is frequently used by children missing from home. This has been raised with South Yorkshire Police and the licensing Committee.

There are increasing concerns about the vulnerability of young females from the Roma Slovak community in Eastwood in relation to child sexual exploitation Concern. The local authority and partners including the police are actively working in this area.

8. Finance

There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

It should be noted that the risk to children who go missing are not confined to child sexual exploitation. Children may come to other forms of harm.

Children missing from education are often not reported as 'missing person's'. The absence from school may trigger a visit from the school welfare officer but may not necessarily be referred to the police as missing person case.

The Rotherham Runaways Action Group have representatives from health and education with regards to records and action required when children are reported missing from education.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

Through their inspections of local authority children's services, Ofsted will include an assessment of measures with regard to missing children as part of their key judgement on the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

Children who run away or go missing from home or care January 2014 (DFE 2014)
APPG inquiry into children missing from care June 2012
Running Away; Ofsted 2012
Lessons to Learn: The Children's Society 2012
Still Running (three) The Children's Society 2011
Missing Children and Adults Strategy The Home Office 2011
Interim Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons ACPO 2013

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