

Local Members' Interest
N/A

Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee – 28th May 2019

Children and Young People who go Missing from Home and Care in Staffordshire

Recommendation

- a. Members are recommended to receive this report to help understand how the County Council is working with key partners in respect of children and young people who go missing from home or care.

Report of Cllr Mark Sutton, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Summary

What is the Select Committee being asked to do and why?

1. This report has been produced at the request of the Staffordshire's Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee with reference to children and young people who go missing from a variety of places including independent children's homes.
2. The report will provide a transparent account of the work undertaken with Catch 22 who have been commissioned to provide this Statutory Duty on behalf of the Local Authority. It will identify proactive measures taken to reduce missing episodes and to protect children when they do go missing. It will identify areas of good practice and highlight key areas in need of further development and our plans in relation to these, including recent recommendations made following the Ofsted inspection of Staffordshire's Children's Social Care Services.
3. The Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee is asked to read the information detailed in the report which provides it with a clear understanding of the statutory requirements and local commissioning arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people who go missing from care and home. Members are invited to offer scrutiny of this activity.

Report

4. Prior to September 2017, children who go missing from home services were delivered by Staffordshire County Council (SCC), Families First and Brighter Futures. Whilst there was a high quality of practice in some areas this created inconsistency in model of service, quality, reporting methods and challenges for other partners across the sector, such as Police, Schools, Health and other providers. In 2017 Catch 22 were commissioned to deliver Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Missing Services across Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent (SoT). The link between missing children and CSE was highlighted by the Children's Commissioner's enquiry (2012) and further strengthened by recommendations

outlined in the 2014 Statutory Guidance on Children who run away or go missing from home or care. The first year of operation has focussed on transition from previous to new delivery models, gathering baseline data, working with partners to ensure consistency and protecting and safeguarding children at risk. For the purpose of this report analysis has been provided by Catch 22 which reflects upon the commissioning arrangements and learning in the first 12 months and identifies service development and improved practices which will be delivered during the remainder of the contract period.

Statutory Requirements:

5. Section 13 of the Children Act 2004 places a responsibility on every Local Authority to establish a Local Safeguarding Children Board. Staffordshire Local Safeguarding Children Board, with its statutory partners i.e. the police, health and education are required to have in place arrangements to ensure that all statutory functions are discharged to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
6. This includes planning to prevent children from going missing, including assessing the risks, analysing data for patterns and trends associated with particular concerns and risks and taking a proactive approach to the reduction of missing episodes and protection of children when they do go missing.
7. As part of the framework to safeguard children, the Children Missing from Home and Care Protocol has been devised between SCC, SoT City Council and the Staffordshire Commissioner's Office to coordinate response and support for those children who go missing from home or care.

Department for Education (DfE) Guidance:

8. In January 2014, the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) published statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care. This guidance was issued under Section 7 of the Local Authorities Social Services Act 1970, which requires local authorities to act under the general guidance of the Secretary of State.
9. The guidance also complements the following:
 - a. Working Together to Safeguard Children and related statutory guidance (2018);
 - b. Missing Children and Adults Strategy (2011);
 - c. Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation (2009);
 - d. Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan (2011); and
 - e. Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations volumes on care planning and review

Local Arrangements:

10. After an extensive period of research and design Catch 22 was awarded the contract and commenced delivery of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Missing Services from September 2017 across Staffordshire and SoT. This contract is in place until August 2020 with options to extend for up to a further 2 years.

11. This integrated commissioning arrangement is led by Stoke on Trent City Council which operates as the lead Commissioner in partnership with Staffordshire County Council and the Staffordshire Commissioner. The financial contributions, per year for these arrangements are outlined below:

Staffordshire County Council	£292,750
Stoke on Trent City Council	£170,919
Stoke on Trent Public Health	£15,000
Stoke on Trent CCG	£41,081
Staffordshire Commissioner's Office (150k early intervention and 15k management)	£165,000
	£684,750

12. Catch 22 conducts all independent return interviews for missing and absent children and young people aged up to 18 years residing in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. This includes young people placed in Staffordshire from other local authorities. The interview is an opportunity to gather information from the young person to identify root cause factors which have contributed to the incident and help to protect children from the risk of going missing again.
13. The interview is in-depth and is completed by a CSE/Missing Case Worker, who is trained to conduct these interviews and can respond to any issues that emerge for example, giving advice and guidance in relation to staying safe, signposting and referring for further support if required.
14. The information gathered during the interview is shared with the local authority and the police; it supports the professionals working with the child/young person to build a comprehensive picture of the reasons behind the missing episode, activity during the missing episode and potential risk factors. It also provides an opportunity to inform care planning, wider strategic planning and for professionals to consider children/young person's views.
15. Catch 22 is also commissioned through the contract to deliver CSE Services across Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent. It enables the Case Worker to assess risk of exposure to exploitation. The link between missing children and child sexual exploitation was highlighted by the Children's Commissioner's Enquiry (2012) and further strengthened by recommendations outlined in the 2014 Statutory Guidance on Children who run away or go missing from home or care.

Children and Young People Missing from Home or Care in Staffordshire:

An Overview of Service Performance - Staffordshire County Council

16. A Performance and Quality Assurance Framework is in place with monthly and annual reporting from Children's Services. Monthly performance reports (**Appendix 1**) provide Senior Managers, Team Managers and Independent Chairs insight into missing indicators and the level of need and vulnerability. Managers and staff use this summary and the detail behind it to:

- a. Ensure appropriate intervention meetings take place based on need and vulnerability (those that have gone missing 3, 5, and 9 times in 90 days are indicated in the attachment) as detailed in the Children Missing from Home and Care Protocol.
 - b. Build intelligence and insight to be confident that these children/young people are appropriately safeguarded and where necessary, assessments and plans are updated.
17. Performance reporting is also provided to the Strategic Overview Missing Board for partnership oversight by SCC.

An Overview of Service and Performance Activity of the Catch 22 Service

18. Catch 22 provides monthly and quarterly performance reports with regard to the activity relating to children and young people missing from home or care. The information presented from Catch 22 is demonstrated in the tables below. Table 3 gives a more detailed analysis of service performance for the first 6 months of the current contract year across the north and south east of the county.

Table 1 - Year 1 Contract Performance (October 2017 to September 2018)

Number of	Missing episodes	Individuals reported missing	Completed Return Interviews	Individuals seen
Oct–Dec 17	515	306	327	202
Jan–Mar 18	468	288	319	225
Apr–Jun 18	598	351	429	252
Jul–Sept 18	566	310	392	213
Total	2,147	1,255	1,467 (68%)	892

Table 2 - 6 months of Year 2 Contract Performance (October 2018 to March 2019)

Number of	Missing episodes	Individuals reported missing	Completed Return Interviews	Individuals seen
Oct–Dec 18	570	321	398	224
Jan–Mar 19	395	248	282	175
Total	965	569	680	399

Table 3 - Year 2 Detailed Analysis (October 2018 to March 2019)

Missing Children/Young People Activity	North Staffs	South/East Staffs	Staffordshire Total
Number of notifications of missing episodes	440	525	965

Missing notifications where a Return Home Interview (RHI) was offered	429	514	943
Number of Individual children/young people reported missing	277	292	569

Profile of Missing Individuals			
Number of children/young people with one missing episode	207	208	415
Number/% of children/young people with repeat missing episodes	70 (25%)	84 (29%)	154 (27%)
Number of children/young people with repeat missing episodes who completed Return Home Interviews	62	61	123 (80%)

Average Age Range (years)	14.71	14.53	14.62
Gender - Number/%			
Females	121 (44%)	136 (47%)	257 (45%)
Males	156 (56%)	156 (53%)	312 (55%)

Cohort Information			
Reported missing from;			
Child/Young Person residing at home in Staffordshire	128	140	268
Child/Young Person in the care of SCC, residing in Staffordshire	45 (16%)	67 (23%)	112 (20%)
Child/Young Person in the care of Stoke on Trent City Council, residing in Staffordshire	3	7	10
Child/Young Person in the care of another local authority, residing in Staffordshire. (CICOLA)	80 (29%)	72 (25%)	152 (27%)
Child/Young Person in the care of SCC, placed in SoT (Pan Placed)	21 (8%)	6 (2%)	27 (5%)

Completion of RHIs			
Number of individuals who received a RHI	200	199	399
% Percentage of Individuals receiving Return Home Interview	72%	67%	69%

Number of interviews completed	262	245	507
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Number of repeat interviews completed on another Return Interview Form	59	125	184
Total number of RHIs offered which were completed	321	370	691
% Percentage of Total Return Home interviews completed	75%	72%	73%
Declined RHIs			
Number of declined/not completed interviews by children and young people missing	77	93	170
Number of referrals returned to Police as unable to engage children and young people missing (RHI declined incidents/not offered)	91	120	211

19. The Annual Contract Report will be produced by Catch 22 in June 2019 to reflect demand and performance during 2018/19. This will enable comparison with trends from the commencement of the contract and across the first year of the service being in place.
20. The priorities in the first year of operation have been to ensure statutory missing interviews are offered to all children and young people who go missing, information is shared across agencies proactively in order to keep children safe, and to develop a model which is consistent in practice Pan Staffordshire in order to inform a baseline of need.
21. Catch 22 has performed well in its first year of delivery and demonstrates commitment and enthusiasm to improve the lives of vulnerable children and young people across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. Relationships are developing well across the partnership and commissioners are working collaboratively with Catch 22 and the wider partnership to further develop the service offer, to improve practice and strengthen operational relationships to improve support and outcomes for children and young people who go missing from home or care.

Current impact of service delivery across Staffordshire:

22. With consent and where appropriate more young people are signposted to other Services e.g. drugs and alcohol, LST, CAMHS, young carers etc. Anecdotal evidence suggests this is much better co-ordinated.
23. The arrangements for a Catch 22 Caseworker to conduct the missing interview provides the opportunity for an independent and objective assessment of the missing episode. There is joint training on arrangements for completion of return interviews and use of the Police Compact ICT system across Catch 22 and the Police.
24. Catch 22 has completed between 70-80% of missing person interviews, in comparison to a national average of 38%. Interviews for missing episodes are

offered to all children and young people who go missing from home or care who were resident in Staffordshire, including those who are placed by other local authorities (LAs) in Staffordshire care homes.

25. The Catch 22 team has a good record of building a rapport and relationship with those at risk of episodes to help reduce this risk.
26. Effective recording on internal ICT systems for the missing episode and return interview, with supporting business processes. This gives confidence and reassurance that Social Workers have the relevant information around safeguarding children/young people.
27. Performance reporting systems are in place, internal monthly and quarterly reports are produced to monitor demand, manage risk, timescale compliance and general insight to trends.
28. A consistent approach to return interviews and gathering of information as a result of a co-designed interview form, good practice guides and joint training.
29. Strong links between CSE and Missing Coordinator, Catch 22 and Children's Services in sharing information.
30. Revised joint missing protocol for children missing from home and care. This was approved in August 2018 by the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.
31. The Missing Children Operational Group has analysed the impact of return home interviews and whether plans take account of risks identified, in the main, appropriate responses are in place to issues and risks noted in young people's return from missing interviews.
32. A member of Catch 22 is the Co-Chair of the English Coalition of Runaway Children (ECRC) Board and enabling Catch 22 to have influence and awareness of current national issues regarding missing children. These include the impact on services of LAC placed out of area on local services. The Stoke and Staffordshire service conducts return home interviews with all CYP who have had a missing episode irrespective of their status. This was recognised as being best practice but is not adopted by all local authorities nationally.

Improvement Planning – Ofsted Inspection Recommendations

33. The Ofsted Focused Inspection on "the Local Authority's arrangements for the protection of vulnerable adolescents, carried out in February 2018 stated:

"When children go missing, the response is effective in the majority of cases. The local authority has commissioned a specialist return home interview service. Most children are seen and benefit from a timely and detailed interview which explores the detail of the missing episode with the young person, captures intelligence and makes recommendations in an effort to reduce risk further. It is a strength that this includes children placed by other local authorities in the Staffordshire area. The

local authority acknowledged that there is a gap for their children in care placed out of area, where the response is less consistent’.

34. The inspection of Staffordshire children’s social services carried out in February 2019 was rated as ‘Good’ in most areas, with the recommendation that some improvement is required in relation to progress of children who need help and protection. This includes some areas of practice for services for missing children and young people.

35. The Inspection Report stated:

‘When children go missing from home or care, return home interviews are not always effective in identifying or reducing risks. Children are offered interviews, but some do not undergo these due to a lack of tenacity and persistence in order to ensure children are seen. Return home interviews do not evidence how information about wider risks to children are shared in order to reduce risk. For those children who go missing frequently, plans are not sufficiently clear to reduce the risk of harm.’

36. Partners have been proactive in responding to the recommendations in the report in developing an improvement plan in the following areas:

- a. To ensure that learning from the analysis of Return Home Interviews is shared more widely to improve the response to care planning.
- b. To seek to increase the number of failed Return Home Interviews to provide greater intelligence on the complexities of children and young people who do not engaged.
- c. To explore the potential improvement in the operation of Missing Intervention Meetings to improve collaborative care and support planning, with a particular focus on those children and young people who have repeat missing episodes and are vulnerable due to high risk behaviours.
- d. To undertake an analysis of cases where Return Home Interviews have been refused or declined to appraise the potential barriers and obstacles for engagement of children and young people. This will also provide greater intelligence on the complexities of these individuals to inform care planning.
- e. To review pathways for children and young people who go missing to ensure that Local Support Teams and social workers are equipped to undertake Return Home Interviews when Catch 22 has been unsuccessful in engaging with young people.

37. Improvement planning includes the following actions:

- a. Catch 22 practices will ensure that all efforts to engage are recorded in the RHI so that clear risk assessment can be carried out and any attempts to complete this by a social worker can be co-ordinated.
- b. Ensuring a method for Catch 22 to resubmit RHIs to the Local Authority and Police when additional information is available will ensure that this can then be used to inform risk assessments and social care support where necessary.
- c. Changes in reporting timescales are being proposed between Catch 22 and the Local Authority to include the details of children and young people with whom

engagement has not been achieved. This will enable SCC to implement a more expedient coordinated approach to completing RHIs, to identify risk and inform care planning.

- d. As part of this Catch 22 will identify the top ten CYP going missing within Staffordshire every month so that those most vulnerable children and young people who go missing are prioritised regarding risk assessment and collaborative care and support planning.
- e. In relation to ongoing workforce development and training on best practice, all Families First staff have been reissued with and encouraged to familiarise themselves with the Children Missing from Home and Care Joint Protocol.
- f. Families First Managers will support and Chair where necessary Missing Intervention Meetings to ensure a robust partnership approach to understanding and supporting the CYP. This will improve risk identification and co-ordinated action planning.
- g. Discussions are taking place to enable Catch 22 to have access to information on SCC's database system maintained for the Building Resilient Families and Communities programme. This will ensure that intelligence held by the provider is also held on the database and used by First Response. In turn this will also inform the providers work/approach in some instances when it holds minimal information on the child/young person prior to carrying out a RHI.
- h. There is a focus on ensuring that the process of reporting CYP who are moved out of area is followed. Alongside this, housing/foster care/residential care co-ordinators will be required to ensure that any Staffordshire CYP that goes missing, even when living out of the county is reported via the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. This in turn will facilitate better co-ordination where RHIs are successfully completed by another provider organisation, a SCC social worker or an out of area social worker.

Priorities for the next 12 months:

38. Review and agree the Performance and Quality Assurance Framework for missing children and young people which combines all intelligence, across the missing partnership and gives confidence from a strategic perspective and better informs practice at an operational level.
39. Triangulation of multi-agency knowledge in relation to missing, CSE and wider vulnerabilities and how this intelligence is used to inform our decision making when placing children in and out of county.
40. Intervention meetings to take place when children have 3, 5, 9 missing episodes in a 90-day window. This is currently under review as an intervention meeting can take place at any time partners become concerned about escalating risks for a young person. Waiting 3, 5, 9 episodes may be too late.
41. Continue to work on a mechanism for ensuring return interviews are offered to all children placed out of county via better use of digital opportunities, findings of a review and proposals will be reported to the Strategic Missing Board on completion.

42. Ensure that Staffordshire Children placed outside of the county – in other local authorities, received the same level of service provided to children placed within Staffordshire.
43. Work in partnership with SoT and Police to conduct joint audits and periodic audits of return interviews and the most prolific 15 children/young people who go missing across Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent, producing joint action plans which ensure greater sharing of risk.
44. Propose further collaboration across SCC, SoT and Police with the Youth Violence and Vulnerability Working group to ensure greater triangulation of intelligence to further protect those children most at risk and explore more opportunities to prevent repeat missing episodes. This will enable a better understanding of the reasons children go missing in line with statutory guidance and incorporate knowledge of children involved in addition to CSE in County Lines, Gangs and Youth Violence.

Contact Officer

Name and Job Title: Jill Mogg – Senior Commissioning Manager
Liz Mellor - Children's Commissioner

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 - Monthly Monitoring Report, Staffordshire Children and Young People who go missing from home or care. (March 2019)

List of Background Papers

Catch 22 Quarterly Reports October 2017-March 2019