

**Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee –  
Thursday 08 November 2018**

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

**Report**

1. 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.
2. In 2017 Catch 22 were commissioned to deliver Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Missing Services across Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent, 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 a baseline of data, working with partners to ensure consistency and protecting and safeguarding children at risk.
3. For the purpose of this report analysis has been provided by both SCC and Catch 22 and reflects the transition period we are currently in.

**Statutory Requirements**

1. Under section 13 of the Children Act 2004, Staffordshire, along with its statutory partners i.e. the police, health and education is required to have in place arrangements to ensure that all statutory functions are discharged to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
2. 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.
3. As part of the framework to safeguard children, the Children Missing from Home and Care Protocol has been devised between SCC, Stoke-on-Trent City Council (SoT) and the Staffordshire Commissioner's Office. It is a requirement for those children who go missing from home or care.

**Department for Education (DfE) Guidance**

4. 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.

5. 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

6. After an extensive period of research and design, Catch 22 was awarded a contract (from September 2017 – August 2020 with an option to extend for up to 2 years) and commenced delivery of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Missing Services from September 2017 across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. 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 contributions per year for these arrangements are outlined below:

<b>Staffordshire County Council</b>	<b>£292,750</b>
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
	<b>£684,750</b>

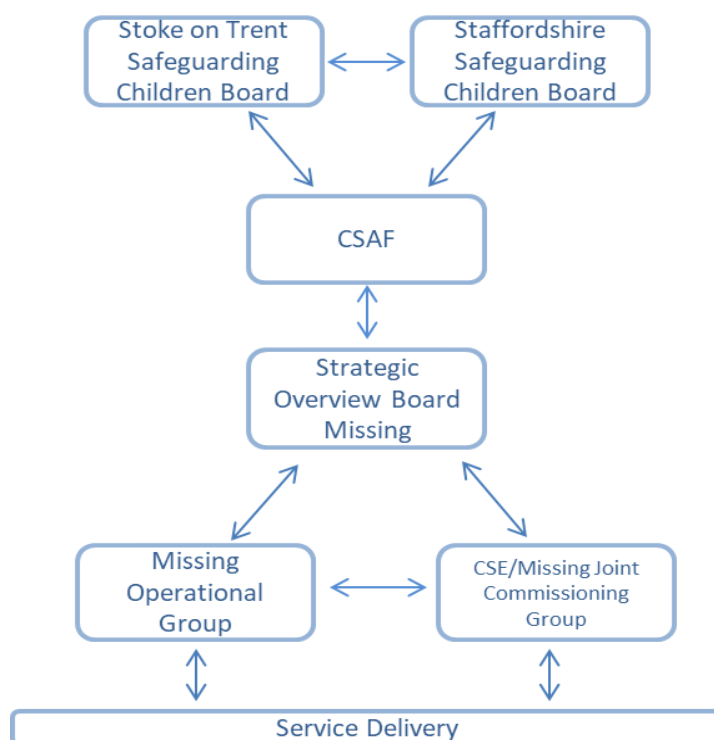
7. Catch 22 conducts all independent return interviews for missing and absent children and young people aged up to 18 years residing in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent (this includes young people placed in Staffordshire from other local authorities). The interview is an opportunity to gather information 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.
8. The interview is in-depth and is completed by a CSE/Missing Case Worker, trained to conduct these interviews and is able to 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.
9. The information gathered during the interview is shared with the local authority and the police; it supports the professionals working with the 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 case planning, for wider strategic planning and for professionals to take into account children's views.

10. 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.

## Governance

11. Please see the below the current governance structure:



12. Child Sexual Abuse Forum (CSAF) is accountable and responsible on behalf of the Local Safeguarding Boards for keeping children safe from sexual abuse.
13. A Strategic Overview Board for Missing Children and Young People meets every quarter; the Head of Partnerships for Staffordshire Police has now taken over the

Chair from the Strategic Lead for Looked After Children and demonstrates a strong, joint partnership responsibility to this area of work. Aims and objectives of the board include continuing to develop the strategic approach to address and escalate concerns regarding children who go missing, contributing to periodic themed audits and disseminating findings to partners.

14. The CSE/Missing Joint Commissioning Group across Staffordshire and Stoke, (chaired by the Strategic Lead for SoT and represented by SCC, SoT and SPCC Commissioners) is responsible for delivering the strategic approach for CSE and Missing Children and Young People and is the accountable body for the Catch 22 contractual arrangements.
15. A Missing Operational Group, chaired by SCC reports into the Strategic Board and focuses on learning and trends across the County, ensuring missing processes and procedures are aligned. Representatives from SCC, SoT, Staffordshire Police and Catch 22 are in attendance.

### **Performance overview of children missing in Staffordshire**

16. A Performance and Quality Assurance Framework is in place with both monthly and annual reporting from Children's Services. Monthly performance reports (Appendix 2) provide Senior Managers, Team Managers and Independent Chairs with 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. Be confident that these children/young people are appropriately safeguarded – where necessary, assessments and plans are updated.
17. Performance reporting is also provided to the Strategic Overview Missing Board for partnership oversight by SCC. The next annual report is due to be presented at the Strategic Board in November and will include the annual reporting from Catch 22 data from the first year of the contract. This report will show trend data and analysis enabling us to focus on our priorities, targeting of resources and direction of travel. The headlines based on the SCC 2017/18 report suggests:
  - a. Information recorded by SCC indicates a total of 739 young people went missing from home and care during 2017/18, with a total of 2284 missing episodes.
  - b. The number of young people who went missing this year has remained stable. However, the number of episodes had increased by almost a third (558), an indication of a small prolific cohort of young people who went missing regularly.
  - c. There were two young people who went missing over 50 times this year which has attributed to the rise in missing episodes.

- d. The majority of young people (73%) going missing are over 14 years of age; 15 year olds continue to be the most prevalent age for when young people go missing.
- e. Most missing episodes (87%) are for young people who go missing and are found within one day.
- f. The split between looked after children (LAC) in care of Staffordshire and other Local Authorities has remained stable. A third of children going missing in Staffordshire are in the care of other Local Authorities.
- g. Work has started to ensure that when Staffordshire LAC are placed out of county, their missing episodes are captured and young people are offered the support they need.
- h. The proportion of young people going missing from independent care homes has increased to 59% (An 18 percentage point increase), 70% are from other Local Authorities.

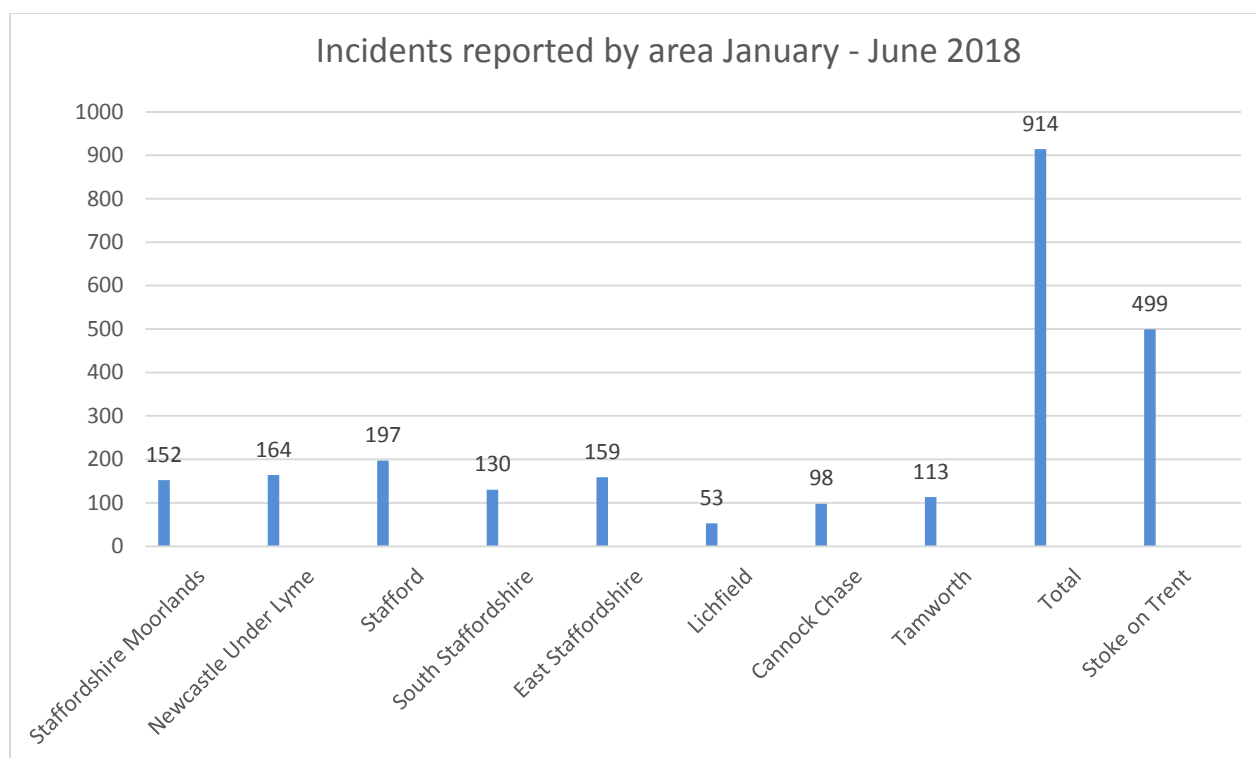
18. The information presented from Catch 22 from October 2017 – June 2018 demonstrates the below:

	<b>Total number of missing incidents</b>	<b>Total number of individuals</b>	<b>Total completed Return Interviews</b>	<b>Total number of individuals seen</b>
Oct–Dec 17	515	237	267	165
Jan–Mar 18	468	233	264	174
Apr–Jun 18	598	163	429	192
<b>Total</b>	<b>1581</b>	<b>633</b>	<b>960</b>	<b>531</b>

19. The demographics for the above data is outlined below:

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Average Age</b>	<b>Key</b>
Home	205	171	13.75	Children residing at home
Care	60	63	15	Child in care of SCC residing in Staffordshire
Pan Placed	40	18	15	Child in care of Stoke-on-Trent residing in Staffordshire
CICOLA	92	41	14.5	Child in care of another LA residing in Staffordshire

20. Data for six months, January – June 2018 has been collated for the purpose of district reporting and once completed will enable a wider district analysis and response.



21. The Annual Contract Report will be produced by Catch 22 in November 2018 and will enable some comparison with trends from the previous year, however caution will need to be taken with these comparisons as the model has now changed from previous approaches to a consistent Catch 22 model across the County.
22. The priorities in the first year of operation was to ensure statutory missing interviews were offered to all children and young people who go missing, information sharing across agencies was proactive in order to keep children safe, to develop a model which is consistent in practice Pan Staffordshire and gather a baseline of need.
23. 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 still emerging across the partnership and there is work to be done with all agencies involved. Commissioners are confident this can be achieved. Much greater analysis and interpretation can be provided from December 2018 for the whole first year reporting from Catch 22.

### **Current impact of service delivery across Staffordshire**

24. Partnership working has improved and is re-enforced through the governance arrangements and the intelligence gained collectively in managing missing episodes.
25. Consistency of service to children and young people: Catch 22 Case Workers conduct return interviews to help build rapport and trust with young people.

26. With consent and where appropriate more young people are sign posted onto other services e.g. drugs and alcohol, LST, CAMHS, young carers etc. Anecdotal evidence suggests this is much better co-ordinated.
27. 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 return interviews and use of the Police Compact ICT system across Catch 22 and the Police.
28. Effective recording on internal ICT systems around 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.
29. 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.
30. 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.
31. Strong links between CSE and Missing Coordinator, Catch 22 and Children's Services in sharing information and attendance at CSE panels through the risk factor matrix and information sharing protocol.
32. Revised joint missing protocol for children missing from home and care. This was approved in August 2018 by the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.
33. 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.
34. The recent Ofsted Focused Inspection on "the Local Authority's arrangements for the protection of vulnerable adolescents, 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"*
35. 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.

### **Priorities for the next 12 months**

36. Complete a comprehensive audit and review of the first year of delivery from Catch 22, this is scheduled for 18<sup>th</sup> October 2018.
37. Review and agree the Performance and Quality Assurance Framework for Missing to combine all intelligence, across the missing partnership and gives confidence from a strategic perspective and better informs practice at an operational level.
38. 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.
39. 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.
40. 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.
41. Ensure that Staffordshire Children placed outside of the county – in other local authorities, receive the same level of service provided to children placed within Staffordshire.
42. To ensure more visibility at CSAF on the activities and performance that is being completed, this will enable greater leadership and accountability across the partnership.
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, 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.

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**List of Background Papers:**

**Appendix B** - <https://www.staffsscb.org.uk/Professionals/Procedures/Section-Four/Section-4-Promoting-the-Welfare-Safety-of-Children-in-Specific-Circumstances.aspx>

**Appendix C** - Catch 22 - Annual Reports Sept 2017- June 2018

