

Local Members' Interest
N/A

Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee – 6th March 2017

Missing Persons

Recommendations

1. This report has been produced at the request of the Staffordshire 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. This is first time that a report has been received in relation to children who go missing from home and care in Staffordshire.
2. The report will provide a transparent, public account of the work undertaken with partners. It will identify proactive measures taken to reduce missing episodes and to protect children when they do going missing. It will identify areas of good progress and highlight key areas in need of further development and our plans in relation to these.
3. Members are recommended to receive this report to help understand how the County Council is working with its 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?

4. The Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee is asked to read the information detailed in the report which provides them with a clear understanding of the statutory requirements and local arrangements in place with partners 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

Background

Service Delivery:

5. The missing service conducts independent return interviews for missing and absent children and young people aged up to 18 years residing in Staffordshire (this includes young people placed in Staffordshire from other local authorities), the interview is an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children from the risk of going missing again and from the risks they may have been exposed to while missing or from risk factors in their home.

6. The interview is in-depth and is carried out by an independent person (someone not caring for the young person) who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able to follow-up any actions that emerge for example, giving advice and guidance in relation to staying safe, signposting and referring for further support if required.
7. 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.

Statutory Requirements

8. 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.
9. 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.
10. As part of the framework to safeguard children, a joint protocol between Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent councils and Staffordshire Police is in place for those children who go missing from home or care. (Protocol in the process of being reviewed/updated with partners).

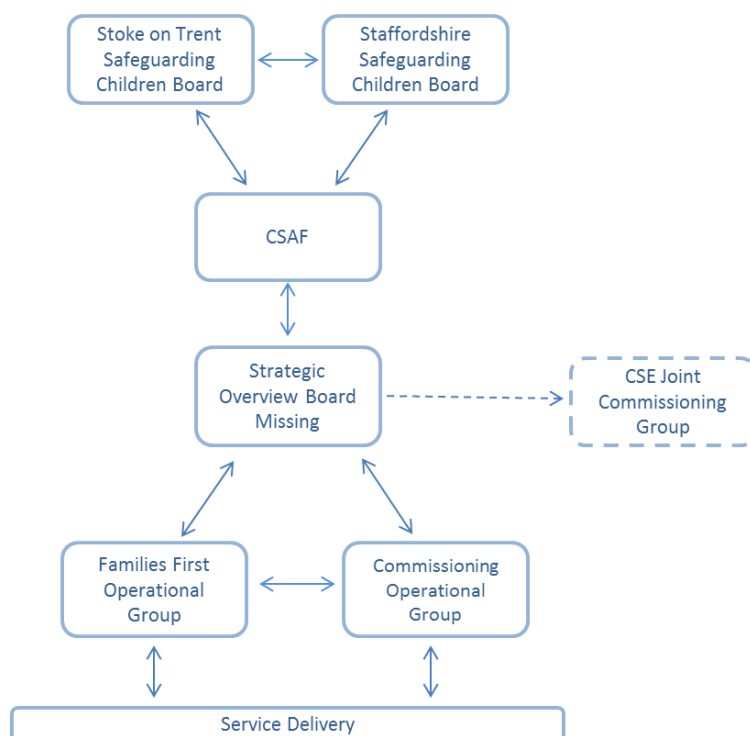
DFE Guidance

11. In January 2014, the Department for Education 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.
12. The guidance also complements the following:
 - a. Working Together to Safeguard Children and related statutory guidance (2013);
 - 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

Governance

13. A multi-agency Strategic Overview Board for missing children and young people is in operation, the Strategic Lead for Looked After Children is the chair of this board. Aims and objectives of the board include: to develop a strategic approach to address and escalate concerns regarding children who go missing, to contribute to periodic themed audits, to disseminate findings to partners and to influence joint training, briefing and publicity campaigns. The board was previously known as the Young Runaways group. Please see Appendix A for the board action plan.
14. Families First Operational Group for missing reports into the strategic board and focuses on learning and trends across the County. An action plan is in place for the next 12 months – please see Appendix A.
15. Joined up arrangements are in place with Stoke on Trent City Council to ensure missing processes and procedures are aligned. A representative from Stoke on Trent City Council attends the above board and group. The Families First CSE Coordinator and Stoke on Trent CSE Social Worker also attend the above group.

Please see the below governance structure:



Commissioning

16. There is a Child Sexual Exploitation Joint Commissioning Group across Staffordshire and Stoke with a multiagency membership. This group sets the strategic direction for the CSE and missing arrangements pan Staffordshire.

17. There is also a commissioned CSE and missing operational group across Staffordshire and Stoke. This group reports into the CSE Joint Commissioning Group (membership includes Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Commissioning, Families First CSE Coordinator, CSE Social Worker, Police Families First Missing Team, Brighter Futures Missing Team). The group supports on the ground delivery by reviewing working arrangements, working through operational challenges and aligning practice/processes in line with local learning and national guidance.
18. In the north of the county (Stoke, Newcastle, Moorlands and Stafford) we have a commissioned service (Brighter Futures) delivering services to children and young people who are at risk of child sexual exploitation, being exploited and recovering from exploitation. This service also provides independent return interviews for all children and young people who go missing or absent whether from home or care settings. The service in the north is funded through by Stoke on Trent City Council, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), Staffordshire County Council and the Oak Foundation.
19. Families First continues to deliver services to children in the remaining five districts (South and East of the County) through their own missing children support workers whilst the new county wide service is commissioned. However, they have aligned processes with the commissioned service; their workers have accessed training delivered by the commissioned service and received training from the Police in use of the Compact data base which records missing episodes for all children across Staffordshire and Stoke.
20. We are in the process of commissioning an independent child sexual exploitation and missing service which will provide county wide support. The service is currently out to tender and is due to go live in September 2017. We have learned a lot from the commissioning of Brighter Futures in terms of performance management and reporting against outcomes. The new specification will be performance managed on a quarterly basis. Stoke City will act as lead commissioner, supported by commissioners from Staffordshire and the OPCC. This is an exciting piece of joined up work across a number of agencies.

Overview children missing in Staffordshire

21. A Performance and Quality Assurance Framework is in place with both monthly and quarterly performance reporting from Families First and Brighter Futures. Monthly performance reports (Appendix B) provide Senior Managers, Team Managers and Independent Chairs insight into missing indicators and the level of need and vulnerability. Managers and staff should 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)
 - b. Be happy that these children/young people are appropriately safeguarded – where necessary, assessments and plans are updated.

22. A quarterly performance report is produced for the Strategic Board – Missing showing trend data and analysis enabling us to focus on our priorities, targeting of resources, and direction of travel. The quarter 1 & quarter 2 (2016/2017) report is attached at Appendix C, please see below for the key headlines for this quarter:
- a. Police reported incidents of missing young people remain stable with 925 reported missing and 356 reported as absent for Q1 and Q2, the majority in the North of the County.
 - b. A total of 577 young people went missing from home and care, with a total of 909 missing episodes and majority of young people going missing (76%) have had previous missing episodes.
 - c. The majority of young people (87%) going missing were between the ages of 12 and 16 years of age, with 15 year olds being the most likely age to go missing (271)
 - d. Most young people who go missing are found within one day (85%)
 - e. The split between Staffordshire and Other Local Authorities has remained stable with roughly a third of Other LA children going missing in Staffordshire
 - f. 44% of young people go missing from Independent Care Homes, with another 38% going missing from home
 - g. Missing from Education - both actual and potential numbers have generally shown an increase year on year from 2013/14 – 15/16
 - h. A second cohort of the top 15 missing young people have been considered and the majority of the characteristics of both cohorts were very similar including youth offending and special educational needs support as well as links to Child Sexual Exploitation (please see Appendix D for the top 15 missing children/young people summary)
 - i. An Other Local Authority Looked After Missing Children audit was undertaken for 28 young people. The majority of notifications included information of social worker details and legal status, but they were not so good at notifying risk factors. The most common push factors were being bored and not getting on with carers. The most common pull factor was returning to family as not wanting to be in care
 - j. The most common reasons given by young people for going missing are consistent with reasons reported previously; 'stayed out longer than they should or to be with friends', followed by 'no apparent reason'. Other reasons provided include coping mechanism, problems in care, unsettled at home, substance misuse, boredom, confrontation and family ties. For a small number (10) possible Child Sexual Exploitation has been recorded as the reason for going missing.
 - k. 81% of missing children and young people received a return interview. The remaining 19% did not receive an interview; this can be due to lack of engagement with the child/young person, the young person moving out of area or the young person refusing to take part in the interview. In these cases the missing worker will continue to attempt to engage with the young person over two weeks and they will also work closely with professionals involved in the child/young person life e.g. care home staff, schools, social worker, parents/carers etc.

Impact of Service Delivery:

23. Partnership working has improved and is re-enforced through operational and strategic groups and the intelligence gained collectively in managing missing episodes
24. Consistency of service to children and young people; the same worker will conduct return interviews to help build rapport and trust with young people.
25. With consent and where appropriate young people are referred onto other services e.g. Base 58, LST, CAMHS, young carers etc
26. We are confident that all children who go missing are contacted to conduct a return interview and where children have engaged return interviews are completed and saved to our performance management systems
27. Greater clarity about why some interviews do not take place
28. Greater independence from the young person's case holding social worker (in line with guidance)
29. Shared knowledge, experience and intelligence gathering
30. Intelligence is robust and it informs planning and strategic direction
31. Joint training on return interviews and use of the Police Compact ICT system
32. Better recording on our 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
33. 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
34. 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
35. Strong links between CSE and Missing Co-ordinator and Brighter Futures and Families First in sharing information and attendance at CSE panels.

Work in Progress:

36. We have improved our notifications of other local authorities placing in Staffordshire procedures with revised notification forms and letters. From 3rd January 2016 this new approach was implemented; further work to monitor the impact of this new approach will be ongoing

37. Local authority is working in partnership with Police around targeting hot spot locations, particular care homes and Foster carers experiencing high levels of call-out incidence. A Care Pack has been developed, and has been circulated to Independent Care Homes and Foster Carers
38. We have a Quality Assurance Officer located in the Placement Team, high levels of missing or concerns re CSE can trigger the Officer visiting Children Home or Independent Fostering Agencies
39. Triangulation of multi-agency knowledge in relation to missing, CSE and quality assurance and how this intelligence is used to inform our internal placement making and shared with other Local Authorities who make contact before placing in Staffordshire
40. Intervention meetings take place when children have 3,5,9 missing episodes in a 90 day window. This is 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. Ongoing engagement with children and young people; recent engagement with the Children in Care Council highlighted the areas below for consideration in relation to support for missing children/young people (further detail is included in Appendix C). This feedback will be used throughout the tender evaluation process.
 - a. Being kind, understanding, a good listener, being calm, respectful and having a good personality were all characteristics young people thought a worker should have to work with young people that go missing
 - b. Young people reported feeling safe when they knew someone cared about them, that they have a good relationship with their carer/s and time is taken to make a bond so they can talk openly about any worries
 - c. Young people suggested that having a list of contact numbers when they feel like running away again (including Childline) ,a top tips information sheet, including reasons or misunderstandings that are the cause of running away may prove useful.

Next steps

42. Communication and awareness raising of children missing from care and home around their vulnerabilities and welfare. This could be an opportunity to work together with Child Sexual Abuse Forum and Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board in development and implementation
43. Have more visibility at CSAF with regard to the activities and performance that is already taking place, this will enhance the governance relationships between the Strategic Board for Missing and CSAF. The CSAF now has representation from SCC and Stoke on Trent City Council
44. Learning from the missing pilot to implement a new countywide service from September 2017. Following contract award in May 2017 the service will have a

three month mobilisation period (1st June – 31st Aug 2017) and during this time commissioners will work closely with the partnership and the service to successfully bring the new service model to life.

45. Reviewing the joint protocol with Staffordshire Police and Stoke on Trent
46. Care provider forum; the police are attending and contributing to the Independent Provider Forum to promote care packs for children's homes and fostering. This approach has promoted more effective joint working with care providers and from March 2017 onwards it will be a county wide forum instead of only being provided in the North of the county
47. Working in partnership with Stoke on Trent City Council and the police to conduct joint audits and periodic audits of return interview forms and the top 15 children/young people who go missing across Staffordshire and Stoke.

Link to Strategic Plan – Resilient communities; ensure effective safeguarding for the most vulnerable in our communities

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Appendices/Background papers

Appendix A - Strategic Overview Board – Action Log

Appendix B - Internal monthly missing report (December 2017)

Appendix C - Quarter 1 and 2 missing performance report

Appendix D - Top 15 missing children/young people summary