

REVIEW OF MISSING CHILDREN AND RETURN INTERVIEWS.

FOR SCRUTINY MEETING 23.09.2013

Introduction

This report is prepared with a view to responding to recommendation 2(b) of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee in the report on the review of the Children in Care Placement Strategy. On 8th January 2013 the Committee considered a presentation by Detective Inspector Phil Shakesheff, West Mercia Police Force Lead for missing children, and work being undertaken at the time by the Council. This paper provides an update since this time.

Since the last presentation to scrutiny in January there has been significant progress in respect of our approach to responding to missing children episodes.

A brief Action Plan of current and future activity is attached.

New definitions

In June 2013 the Department for Education (DfE) produced "Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care" which included the following new definitions:

MISSING:

"Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another."

ABSENT:

"A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be."

These are now the two definitions relating to missing children and West Mercia Police have indicated they will adopt these from September 2013. Further discussions with local police personnel to identify these changes and to ascertain police interpretation of the new guidance is also ongoing.

Updated procedures.

In light of the new definitions the Missing Children procedures are in the process of being updated. This document will be renamed, in accordance with Government

guidance; *“Runaways and Missing From Home and Care Protocol”* (RMFHC Protocol).

The updated document will include all requirements suggested within the Department for Education document, *“Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care”* (June 2013), as well as clarity about local policy and practice.

We must ensure that all relevant staff within children’s services are aware of the new procedures and the current thoughts are to provide an easy to understand pull out to this document explaining the role and responsibilities clearly. This will also help to encourage a timely response to return interview completions and relevant data collection activity.

Return Interviews

A new system for recording return interviews and a pathway for intervention work was introduced in **February 2013**.

Data relating to return interviews is captured by Family Connect, Emergency Duty Team, Cohesion services as well as the West Mercia Police. The information gathered is shared with the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) Missing Children Sub Group which identifies areas of concern and makes recommendations for changes to the intervention pathway including identifying the need for additional targeted work to address issues identified during the return interview process and to improve outcomes.

Data collected for the period March to August 2013 shows:

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| Total missing episodes Mar-Aug 2013 | 87 |
| Total number of children | 71 |
| Of the 71 how many were not known to this or another authority | 5 |
| Male | 32 |
| Female | 39 |
| missing for more than 24hrs | 7 |

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| No. of children disclosed being harmed or abused | 0 |
| Issues of CSE identified of those missing | 6 |
| No. of interviews that should have been completed | 41 |
| No. completed | 31 |
| No. of interviews not yet notified to Family Connect | 10 |
| No. of return interviews deemed not to be required by the case manager and line manager. | 46 |

An OFSTED report “Missing Children” published in February 2013 on local authority work, in relation to children missing from home and care, discovered very limited evidence of return interviews even happening let alone being in a position to gather information about the reasons and risks attached to children who go missing. Telford and Wrekin have a good data collection process that requires some improvement in order to comply with latest guidance. This Missing Children Sub Group will oversee this work.

The sub group now needs to focus on analysing the data to assess additional needs and to ensure that by working with partners appropriate interventions are put into place.

The Missing Children Sub group will also be assessing the quality of support given to young people. This will include analysing the reasons for no return interview being undertaken against a risk assessment tool to ensure the correct decision has been taken. The updated protocol will be used as guidance for the sub group to consider the appropriate course of actions for completing return interviews.

The Missing Children Sub Group will consider performance and key messages arising from return interviews and share this with appropriate partners. This group is chaired by a Detective Inspector from West Mercia Police and includes

representatives from; police, CAMHS, Health and the local authority including; education, placements, LAC and transition and leaving care. Therefore communication to and from the local authority, the police and partners is very good in this area.

With a greater standardisation of data and information across the country it will be easier to compare Telford and Wrekin authority to others, and in particular, those in similar areas.

There are only 10 outstanding return interviews. Further work needs to be undertaken to understand the reason for no response. The sub group will agree an appropriate timescale in which to receive this information or to investigate.

Future progress.

The Missing Children Sub group is committed to signing up to the Children's Society "RUNAWAYS' CHARTER". There are a number of elements that need to be put into place before we sign up, including ensuring that the problems of identifying and responding to children who run away is addressed in key strategic documents such as Joint Strategic Needs Assessment; Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and other Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) plans etc. The MPSG will make recommendations to the LSCB and Health & Wellbeing Board shortly.

The sub group will also lead on providing relevant information to all parties concerning young people going missing. This includes children and young people, parents/ carers and professionals. Through the sub group partnership the proposal will be to develop some literature/leaflets to address the provision of information, as well as face to face contacts through attendance at meetings/ forums and to request local authority staff continue these discussions as part of return interview practice.

Provider conference.

Following discussion at the previous scrutiny meeting in January (p5 Recommendation 6b) it was requested that we look at hosting a provider conference. This will be addressed with a view to holding this before Christmas. The location of these units and the providers of these services has been identified and both the local authority and police will work closely together in order to ensure agreed practice is

followed. This will encourage cooperation between the local authority, police and providers. This conference should allow the council to provide information about local practice and expectations and ensure that locally, providers are clear about the Runaways Missing From Home and Care Protocol. This will include giving all providers information about support services locally that they could access to help the children in their care.

We know Children in care are 3 times more likely to go missing than the general population so it is important to ensure the local providers of residential services for Children and Young People are fully conversant with Telford and Wrekin procedures including what to do if a young person in their care goes missing.

There are currently 22 private residential establishments in Telford and Wrekin and these are managed by 11 different providers.

Action Plan.

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| Updating new Runaways and Missing From Home and Care Protocol | OCT 2013 |
| Awareness raising for staff | Oct onwards |
| Provider conference | Early Dec |
| Sign up to Runaways Charter | Nov 2013 |
| Complete information for providers | Oct 2013 |
| Complete information for Children & Young People | Oct 2013 |
| Complete information for Parents/carers | Oct 2013 |
| Complete information to pass to Foster carers | Oct2013 |
| Complete information for external authorities/staff | Oct 2013 |
| Complete information for T&W staff re role and responsibilities | Oct 2013 |
| Agree Data set for collection at sub group | TBC |
| Review CRM system to capture required information | Oct 2013 |
| Provide data for LSCB and other groups as agreed | TBC |

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| Clarify Local authority and police information sharing agreements |
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| Nov 2013 |
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