

Committee:	Dated:
Safeguarding Sub Committee	10/02/2020
Subject: Children Missing From Care, Home and Education	Public
Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
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Summary

Children missing from care, home and education is a critical safeguarding issue in the City of London. Research shows that a high proportion of children who go missing are at risk of harm, and that harm is likely to be sexual or other kinds of exploitation. The risk is higher for children in residential care.

This report sets out the response of the City of London in respect of missing children and evaluates efficacy alongside efforts to strengthen the service.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Introduction

1. Children missing from care, home and education is a critical safeguarding issue in the City of London. Research shows that a high proportion (25%) of children who go missing are at risk of harm, and that harm is likely to be sexual or other kinds of exploitation. The risk is higher for children in residential care.

2. All children looked after by the City of London under the age of 18 have 24 hour care and/or support have the benefit of oversight of looked after child reviews and the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). This means that children are identified and reported as missing quickly.
3. The London child protection procedures outline the Runaway and Missing From Home and Care protocol¹, to support assessment and response to risk. These were updated in 2019 to include further guidance around how to make legitimate social media searches for children². The City of London refreshed it's own guidance above and beyond these core procedures in September 2019. After auditing our practice in respect of missing children, we are revising the procedures again.
4. The main objective of the procedures is finding and returning the child to safety. Where there are concerns that a child who is missing may have or is likely to suffer significant harm, child protection procedures will be initiated.

- **From home**

5. Children running away from home/going missing is extremely rare in the City of London. The below is what would take place in this circumstance.
6. If a child is known to the service and there is a known risk that the child might run away from home, a safety plan would be devised with the family by the social/early help worker. In most circumstances family members report the child missing to police, take every step possible to find their child. This will involve children's social care in some situations, and a strategy meeting with involved professionals may take place. In the City of London, any child missing from home is offered a return home interview within 72 hours. The purpose of an RHI is to gain intelligence from the child on any risk indicators, any health needs and to reduce the risk of going missing in the future.
7. There were no children missing from home in 2018-2019. One 17 year old child resident in the City of London was reported missing on one occasion in second quarter of 2019-20.

- **From care**

before

- a. When a child moves to a placement, any risks (if any) of going missing are identified, alongside strategies for prevention, reduction of duration and frequency of missing episodes.

during

- b. Foster carer/keyworker tries to locate child if late home, e.g calls/texts child, school, friends.

¹ https://www.londoncp.co.uk/chapters/ch_miss_care_home_sch.html#intro

² <https://www.londoncp.co.uk/index.html> updated 30 September 2019

- c. Foster carer/keyworker reports child missing to the police and calls children's social care (whether day or out of hours service), and birth family if available/safe to do so
- d. Foster carer/keyworker to continue to make all reasonable steps to find child
- e. Within at least three days a strategy discussion between police, children's social care, health and relevant partners is held. The purpose is to have a shared action plan to locate the child and plan a safe positive return.
- f. Note: after seven days the Lead Member is notified.³

after

- 8. Safe and well checks are made by the police & an independent return home interview is undertaken within 72 hours of their return. The purpose is to understand any harm the child might have suffered, listen to why they went away and where and any support needed.

our performance

- 9. In the period April to Dec 2019, there were nine incidences of children going missing from care. Each of these young people are unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). There are UASC specific risks in being missing from care⁴; going underground to avoid immigration control, modern day slavery (illegal working, such as in car washes, restaurants and nail bars, along with cannabis farming and the drug trade), debt bondage, new instructions from traffickers along with other criminality and the risks inherent in being a young person from another country with limited English language skills in the capital city.
- 10. In nine months two children of the children who were offered RHIs declined this service. Action For Children is commissioned to provide our RHIs. In January 2020 the Director of Childrens Services, the QA Service Manager, the Children's Social Care and Early Help service manager and the commissioning manager met with Action for Children to seek creative ways of engaging children to ensure that RHIs are accepted by young people. The worry was that Action for Children might have given up too easily on young people who didn't want an RHI. Action for Children accepted the challenge and are due to report back on their performance – the aim is that all young people accept RHIs as these are an important tool in improving safety.

Children missing from education

- 11. The Education and Early Years Service regularly prepares a Safeguarding Update to this committee, covering amongst other areas, children missing

³ 3.16 Actions when the whereabouts of a child is not known. London CP Procedures.

⁴ https://www.londoncp.co.uk/chapters/ch_miss_care_home_sch.html#act_resp subject to immigration control

education and those children who are at risk of missing education (where attendance is below 90% which equates to one day per fortnight). Children missing education is a safeguarding concern. Children are at increased risk of sexual, criminal and other forms of exploitation when they are missing education. This can be both online and in 'real' life, compounded by social isolation, opportunistic risk and grooming.

12. The devastating serious review case of 'Chadrack' evidences a need to look at familial context when thinking about children missing from school. The City of London has played a key role in updating safeguarding procedures with the London Borough of Hackney for education providers that takes into account the learning from the Serious Case Review.
13. Children can be missing education for reasons of ill health and exclusion. The Education and Early Years Service and Children's Social Care and Early Help Service work closely to improve outcomes for children, and record joint work on our Mosaic database. For example the teams worked together on cases where children have low attendance, require educational welfare intervention or additional support with academic work in the lead up to GCSEs.
14. Not all children missing education are supported by Children's Social Care and Early Help as the presenting issues may not warrant intervention – for example arranging education provision for a child who is in hospital for a period of time. The Education Service monitors the children every two weeks to increase attendance and prevent children missing out on learning.
15. The Lead Advisor for Universal Education Services prepares a termly report on missing from education, which is then discussed at CSMT and with the DCCS Director. Regular case updates are also sent to the Head of Service and to the Assistant Director, People. The Lead Advisor also attends the Multi Agency Child Exploitation and Vulnerable Adolescent Forum that is jointly chaired by the Service Manager for Children's Social Care and the City of London police. The Lead Advisor's report is separated by children missing education, those at risk of missing education (low attendance), those unable to attend school for medical reasons and children being electively home educated. Further more, children are classified as either not known to children's social care, Children in Need and children subject to a child protection plan.

Performance

16. Performance data, captured in these termly reports helps support the management of risk for each child. Risk is better managed when it is shared. Cases that are jointly worked between the Education and Early Years Service and the Children's Social Care and Early Help Service are underlined to demonstrate the strength of our collaboration for children and families in the City of London.
17. There are no children missing education. The data below shows that children at risk of missing education are tracked and supported to prevent decline in attendance. This is above and beyond statutory requirement and oversight is

robust in ensuring no children are missing from education in the City of London.

March-May 2019

18. Total number of children being monitored: 18
Electively Home Educated Children: 3
Children Missing Education / At risk of Missing Education children: 14 (3 CP, 0 CIN, 3 EH)
Children unable to attend school full time / part time due to medical reasons: 2
(1 already included above in EHE)

June-August 2019

19. Total number of children being monitored: 18
Electively Home Educated Children: 3
Children Missing Education/At risk of Missing Education children: 14 (3 CP, 0 CIN, 10 EH)
Children unable to attend school full time / part time due to medical reasons: 2
(1 already included above in EHE)

September-October 2019

20. Total number of children being monitored: 18
Electively Home Educated Children: 3
Children Missing Education or unplaced: 1 (although receiving full educational entitlement at alternative provision)
Children at Risk of Missing Education : 13 (3 CP, 2 CIN, 5 EH)
Children unable to attend school full time / part time due to medical reasons: 2
(1 already included above in EHE)

November 2019-January 2020

21. Total number of children being monitored: 13
Electively Home Educated Children: 4
Children Missing Education or unplaced: 0
Children at Risk of Missing Education children: 9 (1 CP, 2 CIN, 2 EH)
Children unable to attend school full time / part time due to medical reasons: 2
(1 already included above in EHE)

Observations

Joint front line working

22. The numbers of children at risk of missing education has decreased from 14 to 9 over the first three quarters of 2019-20. The numbers of children who received joint support from the two services increased sharply from quarter one to quarter two and is sustained as a proportion of children at risk of missing education throughout the three quarters. This means that children and families are having the broadest possible support, in each of their domains; family, environment, school, online and health. Joint work assisted two children subject to a child protection plan in securing school placements and keeping a close watch on patterns of attendance following a move out of the City to a more protective family member.

Joint senior management review

23. 'Top 3' is a senior management oversight group that comprises of the Assistant Director of People, the Head of Homelessness, the Head of Service for Education and Early Years, the Service Manager for Adult Social Care and the Service Manager for Children's Social Care and Early Help. The purpose of the meeting is to consider high profile cases which cross over at least two of the services from a Think Family perspective.
24. In December two cases that were considered had a missing from education as an element of concern, and these had the benefit of joint senior management discussion and oversight. The outcome for one child was that he had the opportunity of mentoring, funding having been agreed at that meeting, and that the family had the opportunity of systemic family intervention jointly undertaken with the social worker and systemic clinician to improve relationships in the home.

Conclusion

25. The City of London is challenging itself to provide the strongest support for children at risk of going missing from home, care and education. The City Specific guidance on 'missing' has been reviewed and updated following the Chadrack Serious Case review. The guidance will be updated again following next steps with service development:
- a. A thematic audit on children known to children's social care and early help who have been missing from care, home or education is in the Quality Assurance workplan for February 2020.
 - b. Close contract monitoring with Action for Children with 2020.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 (**non public**) – case examples of children missing

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