

<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Safeguarding Sub-Committee	07/06/2021
<b>Subject:</b> Missing from Home, Care and Education Review	<b>Public</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	1 & 2
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?</b>	<b>NA</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report authors:</b> Rachel Talmage, Service Manager, Children's Social Care and Early Help, People Department, DCCS  Kirstie Hilton, Lead Advisor, Universal Education Services, People Department, DCCS	

### 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. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) can be at risk of control and movement by traffickers. Operation Innerste, which began in 2021, aims to reduce trafficking within the UK by fingerprinting all new UASC, and therefore making them less desirable to traffickers.

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

#### Background

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. UASC are at further risk of trafficking once in the UK, if their

traffickers want them to move within the UK or across Europe or stay located and work illegally.

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 support of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). This means that children are identified and reported as missing quickly.
3. The Child Protection Procedures: Children Missing from Care, Home and Education Strategy,<sup>1</sup> outline the procedures to support assessment and response to risk. These were reviewed in the City of London and updated in March 2021 and are appended at Appendix 1. 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 suffered, or is likely to suffer significant harm, child protection procedures will be initiated.

### **Children Missing From Home**

4. Children running away from home/going missing is extremely rare in the City of London. No resident child has been reported missing in 2020/21. Paragraphs 5 and 6 below outline what would take place if a child was reported missing from home.
5. 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, and 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 the interview is to gain intelligence from the child on any risk indicators, health needs, and to reduce the risk of them going missing in the future.
6. If a child resident outside of the City is located inside the City of London after having gone missing from home, then the City of London Children's Social Care Service will hold a strategy meeting with the resident local authority. This ensures follow-up with the resident local authority, and any contextual safety issues are taken into account.

### **Children Missing From Education**

7. The Education and Early Years Service monitors all children who are known to the service who are either missing education (not on school roll), at risk of missing education (where attendance is persistently below 90%), electively home educated, or who are unable to attend school full time due to medical reasons. Details of these children are kept and monitored until it is no longer

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.londoncp.co.uk/ch\\_miss\\_care\\_home\\_sch.html](https://www.londoncp.co.uk/ch_miss_care_home_sch.html)

necessary to do so.

8. 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 in person or online, and can be compounded by social isolation, opportunistic risk and grooming.
9. Children can be missing education for reasons of ill health and exclusion. The Education an 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.
10. 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, or where the Education Welfare Consultant acts as the lead professional in delivering preventative services. The Education Service monitors the children every two weeks to increase attendance and prevent children missing out on learning.
11. Under usual circumstances, the Lead Advisor for Universal Education Services prepares a termly report on children missing from education, which is then discussed at the Children's Senior Management Team and with the Director of the Department of Community and Children's Services. 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 (MASE) that is jointly chaired by the Service Manager for Children's Social Care and the City of London Police (CoLP). The Lead Advisor's report makes reference to whether children are either not known to children's social care, are Children in Need, and subject to a Child Protection Plan.

### ***Response to COVID-19***

12. Following the restrictions placed on the country during the COVID-19 pandemic, the work carried out by the Education Service changed in response to the closure of schools and the need to ensure that children had access to devices to be able to fully engage with remote learning.
13. During the first lockdown in March 2020, a Vulnerable Children list was created in collaboration between the Education and Early Years' Service and the Children's Social Care and Early Help Service to ensure that all children at risk of not being able to access a device and those without internet access were identified. This list has continued to be an essential focus throughout the pandemic, and all services have continued to review it over the last 12 months on a monthly basis. These meetings, which are attended by the Children's Social Care Team Manager, Special Educational Needs and Disability

(SEND) Lead Advisor and Lead Advisor for Universal Services creates an opportunity to share vital information on family situations as well as agree on how to proceed with certain cases.

### **Performance**

14. Over the last year, reporting mechanisms have been adapted to reflect the change of situation and focus. Termly reports have not been completed, but have been replaced with a monthly review of the Vulnerable Children List. In May 2020, there were 49 children on our list. Currently there are 51 children and young people on this list, including children with Education, Health and Care Plans, children known to the Children's Social Care and Early Help Service, as well as the children being electively home educated.
15. Reports were presented to this Committee in June 2020 and October 2020 as an overview to the work that the Education Service was doing to support families. A separate report in May 2020 highlighted the current work being done to support our vulnerable children in relation to devices and internet access.
16. Since September 2021 there has been an increase in the number of children being electively home educated as a direct result of COVID-19. The number of children has gone from three in August 2020 to seven by the end of 2020, which is a 133% increase. In line with our policy, we have successfully engaged with all families and will continue to monitor educational progress to ensure that all the children are receiving a suitable level of education.

### **Children Missing From Care**

17. The paragraphs below outline the key process in the reviewed guidance:

#### *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.
- 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.

*After*

- 18. 'Safe and well' checks are made by the CoLP and 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 to, and any support needed.
- 19. There are UASC-specific risks in being missing from care:<sup>2</sup> 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.

**Current Position**

- 20. Operation Innerste has been developed as a nationwide response to tackling trafficking from and within the UK. The CoLP and Children's Social Care have signed up and Operation Innerste is working in practice, involving CoLP using ink fingerprints for all new UASC on welfare (not criminal) grounds. The purpose of this is to reduce the suitability of a young person to be further trafficked from the City of London to elsewhere in the UK or EU – for example, for movement of drugs or illicit goods or for illegal work (modern day slavery). It is hoped that our young people will not be chosen by traffickers for further onward movement/illegal activity.
- 21. Children missing from care are reviewed at strategy meetings, with police, social care, and health (at least), and at the bimonthly Multi-Agency Child Exploitation and Vulnerable Adolescent Forum, with drug workers, nurses, police, education, social care and youth workers. The point is to have a strategic review of child safety in terms of individuals, locations and patterns to reduce and prevent harm.

---

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.londoncp.co.uk/ch\\_miss\\_care\\_home\\_sch.html](https://www.londoncp.co.uk/ch_miss_care_home_sch.html)

## Key Data

	2020/21 (Period/Quarter End)			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
<b>Missing From Care / Home</b>				
Children Looked After (CLA) missing at the end of the period	2	2	1	0
Total CLA who went missing during the period	2	2	2	1
Total CLA missing episodes during the period	2	3	2	1
Total CLA absent episodes during the period	0	1	0	0
Total of children Missing from Home	0	0	0	0
Total of children Missing from Education	0	0	0	0
<b>Return Home Interview (RHI)</b>				
Total RHI offered	2	1	2	2
Total RHI accepted	0	0	2	2
Total RHI completed within 72 hours	0	0	2	2
<b>RHI for Missing Episodes only</b>				
Total RHI offered	2	1	2	2
Total RHI accepted	0	0	2	2
Total RHI completed within 72 hours	0	0	2	2

22. In 2020/21 there were no children missing from their home in the City of London.

23. In 2020/21 there were seven children who went missing from care.

24. The seven children were all black boys aged 16/17, six of whom were subject to immigration control as UASC. Six of these children are Muslim, one is Christian; two are Sudanese, one Eritrean, one Ethiopian, one Ivorian, and one Algerian; one is a European Union citizen, and is Spanish (Moroccan heritage) and Muslim. Our child in care population is largely black boys from African and Middle Eastern countries.

25. Reasons for going missing included: not wanting to return home to Spain; wanting to move placement; being out with friends; and a move to France.

26. **Compliance with policy:** Return Home Interviews were offered promptly in all cases where the child returned. One child did not return, after making it clear he was not returning to the UK.
27. Quality of Return Home Interviews and the poor uptake of the interviews when offered were reviewed in December 2020; we had noticed that on four occasions young people were offered Return Home Interviews but did not take them up. Contract requirements were increased, with clear expectation of engaging all young people. Actions were set for children who have been recommissioned from April 2021 to undertake, and high-performance targets were set.
28. We have strengthened placement stability work at the outset of a placement move. Children in Care have been supported with additional early intervention sleep work (City of London/Coram Sleep Project). These pieces of work are helping happiness in placement, and a reduction in going missing to force a placement move.
29. There were less 'missing' episodes with COVID-19 regulations in place, with opportunities limited, and a clear stance on avoiding placement move unless for a critical reason, such as immediate safety.
30. **Corporate & Strategic Implications:** As corporate parents, we are responsible for our children in care. This fits within the corporate objectives that people are safe and feel safe, and that people enjoy good health and wellbeing. For example, keeping children away from county lines, by offering clear safety and boundaries, with immediate, skilled care and response to going missing is a clear strategic priority.
31. Operation Innerste is a CoLP initiative with Children's Social Care. CoLP are committed to supporting children who go missing and are attendant at every strategy meeting, often going above and beyond, linking in with the Metropolitan Police to find our missing children.
32. **Financial implications:** none
33. **Resource implications:** staff time is involved in ensuring children's safety. The number of missing episodes has reduced and additional staff time is not needed at this point.
34. **Risk implications:** there is the risk of serious harm occurring while a young person is missing.
35. **Equalities implications:** the Missing Persons Guidance complies with our public Sector Equality Duty 2010. The young care leavers who are going missing are brown or black teenagers. This is largely reflective of the Child in Care population. These young people are each facing uncertainty of security, (given immigration rules), and potential trafficking. These are vulnerable young black boys. The City of London response is to offer love and care through:

- a. highly trained social work practice
- b. upskilling of involved professionals around the child with our Early Intervention Mental Health project to support sleep, diet and exercise as the pillars of mental health
- c. mentoring, including via country-specific charities, such as Waging Peace
- d. well supported education
- e. leisure and creative opportunities
- f. Operation Innerste to offer safety from onward trafficking.

36. **Security implications:** Children's Social Care and CoLP are fully trained in and conversant in the Prevent agenda. Each looked-after child has a 'risk assessment', which is updated following any missing episode, subject to professional judgement. There has not been a reason to make a Prevent referral or invoke a Channel Panel.

## **Conclusion**

37. The Children Missing from Care, Home and Education Strategy was reviewed in March 2021; little needed amending and the process works in practice. The number of home educated children has increased, and the number of children missing from care have reduced. Children are not going missing from home. There is a robust practical prevention and response to children going missing in the City of London.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Child Protection Procedures: Children Missing from Care, Home and Education Strategy reviewed March 2021

### **Rachel Talmage**

Service Manager, Social Care and Early Help  
People Department, DCCS

T: 020 7332 3501

E: [Rachel.Talmage@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:Rachel.Talmage@cityoflondon.gov.uk)

### **Kirstie Hilton**

Lead Advisor, Universal Education Services  
People Department, DCCS

T: 07803437510

E: [kirstie.hilton@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:kirstie.hilton@cityoflondon.gov.uk)