Derby City Council

Children Missing from Care

SUMMARY

1.1 Children in Care are three times more likely to go missing from their home than those who are not in care.

The reasons why children run away are varied, complex and unique to individual children. Causes can include arguments and conflict, physical and emotional abuse, issues in relation to boundaries and control, poor family relationships and conflict within a placement.

1.2 The multi-agency Missing Person Monitoring Group (MPMG) meet monthly to review all children in care and children where there is cause for concern, who have had a missing episode during the preceding month. Representatives include: Derbyshire Constabulary, the Looked After Children's Nurse, Independent Children's Homes, Safe and Sound, Runaways Workers, The Youth Offending Service, Connexions and Derby City Children's' Homes. The meeting is also an opportunity to discuss issues in relation to the Runaway and Missing from Home or Care protocol, processes, and share good practice.

1.3 A sub group of the Derby Children's Safeguarding Board, the Vulnerable Young Persons Sub Group (VYPSG), receive quarterly reports from the MPMG, detailing information about numbers of children missing; disruptive and supportive work undertaken by Runaways Workers and multi-agency teams.

1.4 A joint Missing From Care or Home protocol is now implemented that has been developed in partnership by the Council with Derbyshire County Council and Derbyshire Constabulary.

RECOMMENDATION

2.1 To note the update report on children missing from care.

2.2 To provide dates of the MPMG to the Corporate Parenting Sub Board in order that representatives may, from time to time, attend the monthly meetings.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

3.1 In October 2012, the Children's Rights Director for England published a report giving children's views and experiences of running away from care. Children gave a strong message

in the report that adults must listen carefully to, and resolve problems that they are experiencing where they live and should seek to debrief and listen to children when they return from running away.

3.2 The recent high-profile cases of child sexual exploitation have highlighted the vulnerability of children who go missing, especially those who are looked after by the local authority and living in children's homes.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

4.1 **Number of children and young people missing 2013 – 2014**

For children and young people placed out of the City there were three reported incidents of children in care going missing during 2013 to 2014. This is a significantly lower figure than those recorded for children and young people placed in the city and further scrutiny of the processes by which data in relation to children in care placed outside of the City who go missing, is required.

Within the City, the following episodes of children missing from care were reported:

2013 -2014	Missing from **DCC Homes**		Missing from **Independent Homes**		Missing from **Foster Care**	
	Episodes	No of YP	Episodes	No of YP	Episodes	No of YP
Q 1	29	13	20	5	5	3
Q 2	47	19	25	7	6	3
Q 3	12	8	6	6	5	2
Q 4	12	8	2	2	7	2
TOTAL	100	48	53	20	23	10

4.2 When a child is placed outside of their local area the placing local authority notifies the host local authority and a risk assessment in relation to the young person is completed by their social worker who includes risk of missing from care and actions to be taken.

4.3 Workers from the Derby Runaways project (a total of two full time equivalents across the City) are based within each of the City's locality Multi Agency Over 11s team. Their role is to work in partnership with the police and other agencies, monitor missing young people in the locality, offer support on the young person's return, engage young people in preventative work, and carry out return interviews.

Key to this is liaison with the police including providing intelligence that may indicate a need to further investigate any reported names, addresses or 'hotspots' and plan disruption activities, in particular where sexual exploitation and/ or abuse is a feature.

The Runaways (or key) worker will, dependent on the reasons for going missing, support the young person to explore alternative solutions to running away.

Return interviews are proving to be an effective way of identifying children and young people at risk of significant harm. They help reduce and prevent, further episodes of running away by helping young people understand the risks involved in being away from their family or carers. For example, if the young person is in conflict with a carer or peer, the worker will support them to identify a safe place to go during times of crisis, supporting them to find ways of handling the situation differently in a way that doesn't make them as vulnerable.

The identification of potential trends in local areas can lead to preventative strategies being developed by a multi-agency partnership with, for example, schools, the Youth Offending Service and the Multi-Agency Team.

Police officers from the Missing Person Unit (MPU) are currently carrying out briefing sessions within teams to inform all staff who may be asked to complete a return interview about completion of the form and what information is helpful for the police and how this is used.

4.4 When a young person is reported missing the police will determine the level of risk for the child and their level of response. Runaways Workers receive daily reports from the police giving details of children who have gone missing and reports of when they have been found, and some details of the circumstances surrounding the disappearance.

When a young person is found, the police carry out a safe and well check. A Return Interview is carried out within 72 hours, either by a Runaway Worker or Local Authority worker. The interview helps workers identify and reassess any risk or vulnerabilities in order that preventative work can be undertaken with the young person. Where a young person is missing for five days or earlier depending on circumstances, an emergency strategy meeting of professionals will be called.

4.5   The Missing Person Monitoring Group has specific responsibilities that include:

- To collate and analyse return interviews, in order to quality assure, measure impact and effectively monitor and share information across agencies in order to identify any recurring issues or 'hot spots'

- To receive details, via social workers of young people placed outside of the local area who have had a missing episode enabling the group to be able to report on this, via the VYPSG to DCSB.

- To ensure that there is an overview of children placed in Derby from other Local Authorities. On-going work with other placement providers is critical to this, with a particular focus on closer scrutiny of young people's plans and the impact of any support that has been offered by Runaways Workers.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1   To adequately safeguard and protect the children and young people in our care the joint missing from care protocol is essential

This report has been approved by the following officers:

Legal officer Financial officer Human Resources officer Estates/Property officer Service Director(s) Other(s)	5 Hazel Lymbery: Director of Specialist Services 01332 642669 hazel.lymbery@derby.gov.uk Andrew Bunyan, Strategic Director for Children and Young People

For more information contact: Background papers: List of appendices:	Donna Brooks 01332 641317 donna.brooks@derby.gov.uk None Appendix 1 – Implications

IMPLICATIONS

Financial and Value for Money

1.1 Staff providing services to missing children and young people is funded from core budgets and there are no financial implications.

Legal

2.1 Local authority responsibilities in relation children in care are contained within the Children Act 1989 and subsequent legislation and regulations

Personnel

3.1 No issues arising

IT

4.1 No issues arising

Equalities Impact

5.1 The service continues to give due consideration to race, gender, culture, sexual orientation, religion, and disability in relation to children in care and their placement needs.

Health and Safety

6.1 The processes outlined are intended to ensure safer processes in relation to children who go missing

Environmental Sustainability

7.1 No implications

Property and Asset Management

8.1 No implications

Risk Management

9.1 Individual risk assessments are core to ensuring the safety of children in care and form a key part of the partnership protocol

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

10.1 Priorities include:

- inspiring start in life

- inspiring start in life by improving educational attainment

- inspiring working life by improving skills and creating jobs