

Update Report on Children in Care Missing

Purpose

- 1.1 The Early Help Service holds the strategic responsibility within the council to manage and report the regular monitoring of all children and young people who go missing.
- 1.2 To ensure there is a comprehensive oversight of those most vulnerable young people who have missing episodes, the Early Help Service also report the Missing agenda to the Exploitation and Vulnerable Young Peoples Group which is a sub-group of the Derby and Derbyshire Children's Safeguarding Partnership.
- 1.3 This report gives an overview of the current performance and actions implemented to support improved outcomes for those Looked After children who go missing.

Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To ensure Corporate Parenting Committee are kept abreast of developments, progress, and impact of the missing protocol on looked after children to date.

Reason(s)

- 3.1 To ensure Corporate Parenting Committee can comment on any developments and progress with regards to the missing protocol for looked after children to date.

Supporting information

4.1 The missing protocol in partnership with Derbyshire Childrens Service and Derbyshire Constabulary was updated in April 2023.

The purpose of the missing protocol is to ensure the adequate safeguarding of children and families normally resident in Derby and Derbyshire, or those using services in the area. It should be read and implemented by all practitioners and managers working with children or young people who are currently missing or are at risk of going missing.

The protocol has been developed in accordance with:

- *Statutory Guidance Children who Run Away or go Missing from Home or Care (2014)* which sets out the steps local authorities and their partners should take to prevent children from going missing and to protect them when they do go missing;
- *Interim Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons (2013); and*
- *College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice – Missing Person Investigations (7th January 2021)*

Progress of the Missing Protocol over the last 12 months

5.1 Strategic meetings have been maintained over the last twelve months, with these meetings taking place bi-quarterly and are used to drive the missing protocol.

The Missing Strategic meeting has a wide and diverse membership from both internal and external partners.

5.2 Since the last Corporate Parenting Committee meeting there has been significant progress which is noted below:

- Updated the missing protocol and relevant training materials to ensure that all Early Help and Social Care are implementing the correct procedures.
- Updated the missing pathway on the recorded systems which Childrens services use to ensure we are incorporating a strength-based model, placed based risk and disruption of missing episodes using a disruption and safety action plan which is within the return interview and missing intervention planning meetings (3 or more missing episodes in 30 days) and other relevant meetings linked to looked after children.
- Updated training resources on best practice on completing a return interview should a young person be reported as missing, and this takes into consideration persistent missing children.
- A representative from Early Help with a missing resource attends Enhanced case planned meetings (these are in direct relation to Looked after children)
- New guidance for residential staff to complete return interviews and a process which embeds this to ensure young people can discuss their missing episodes with the person they identify as having the best relationship with has been created in partnership with the children in care teams and the DCC residential homes in what is referred to as "Exception" Guidance on Return Interviews for Derby City Council Residential Staff.
- Delivery of training and creating materials for residential staff to complete return interviews. Residential staff will not be able to complete return interviews unless they have completed this training.
- The use and referrals to youth alliance when young people are discussed at the operational monthly missing monitoring group If places/ hot spots have been identified to help reduce risks and vulnerabilities.
- Undertook a best practice session on missing children in care which focused on; how to support in reducing missing episodes exploring the use of analysis, safety, and disruption at a child in care teams development day.

- Creation of a missing safety planning tool to be used with young people. This has been piloted with Early Help Teams. Moving forward would like to take this to children in care council to review and gain young people's views and make appropriate changes. In the meantime, this will now be sent to the whole of Early Help and Social Care to be used as a prevention tool and will be on the missing training page as a resource.
- Creation of a Child at Risk of exploitation team (July 2023) formed of practitioners from the Early Help teams, who will undertake "mapping" of children at risk of exploitation which will have cross over with looked after children and missing episodes. Therefore, joining up gaps of information and being able to report through appropriate mechanisms any children where there are concerns including looked after children.
- A recent appointment of a Childrens Practitioner whose work will focus is on supporting persistent missing LAC children. To attempt to disrupt missing episodes and offering preventative work around missing and to ensure we have a full understanding of missing episodes by completing return interviews.
- Crime Prevention Workers within the CRE team are visiting DCC residential homes weekly to undertake direct sessions with young people, group work with all residents and offer support to staff around ASB, Crime and CRE as additional support to keep young people safe, which includes the reduction of missing episodes.

Looked After Children Missing Data

6.0 *Overview of Missing for January to December 2023*

Between January and December 2023 there have been in total for Derby City Council Children and Young People 1562 missing episodes. Of this number, 525 missing episodes for 74 young people are looked after children.

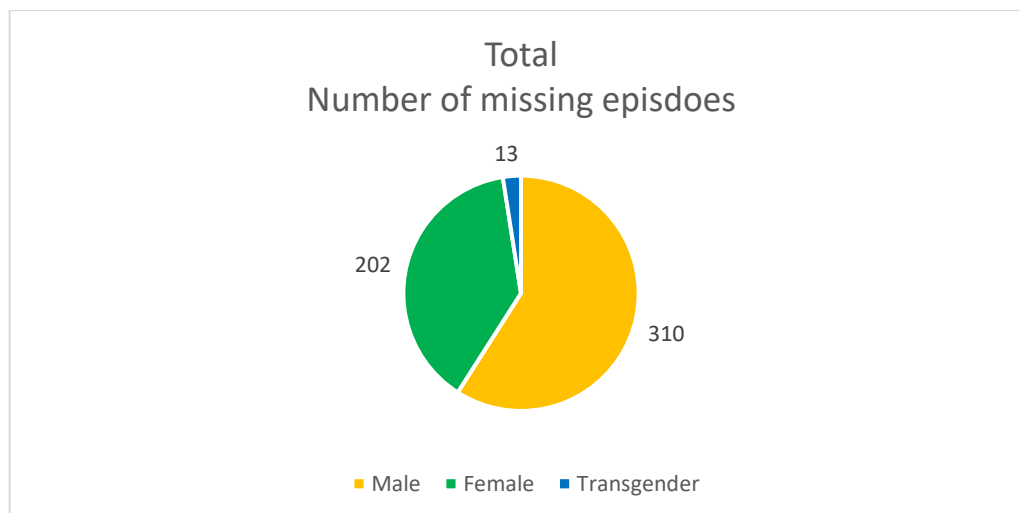
The previous year, the number of looked after children reported missing was significantly higher, there was 646 missing episodes and a total of 86 young people.

There are currently 3 UASC's who are deemed long-term missing, and these are being monitored through the missing protocol with Head of Service oversight from the Children in Care Team.

6.1 *Demographics*

The graph below demonstrates that young males have the highest number of missing episodes with a total of 310 out of the 525.

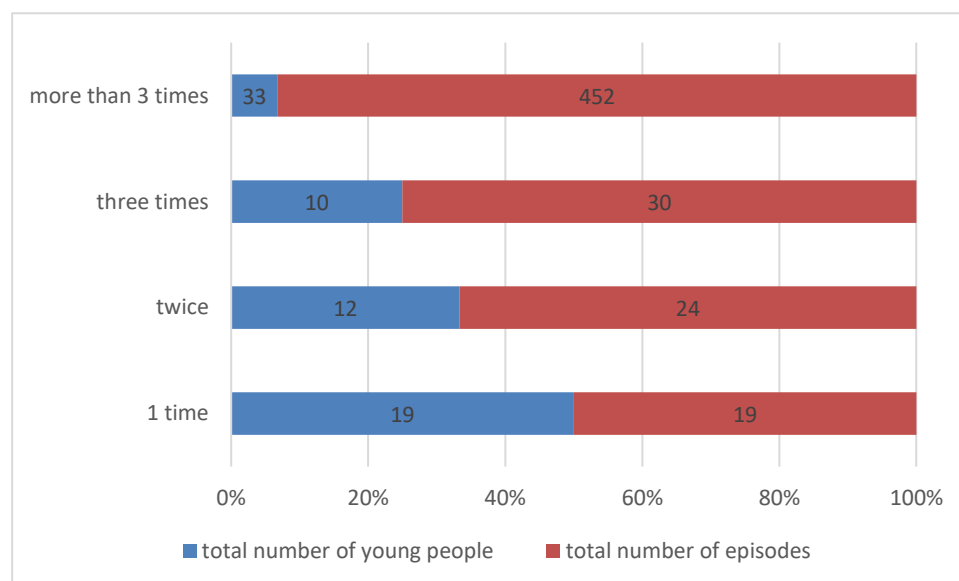
6.2



Most of these missing episodes for young males are aged between 13 – 17 years, with a spike for all genders at the age of 16 years, which totals 167 missing episodes and 26 young people.

Patterns of Missing Episodes

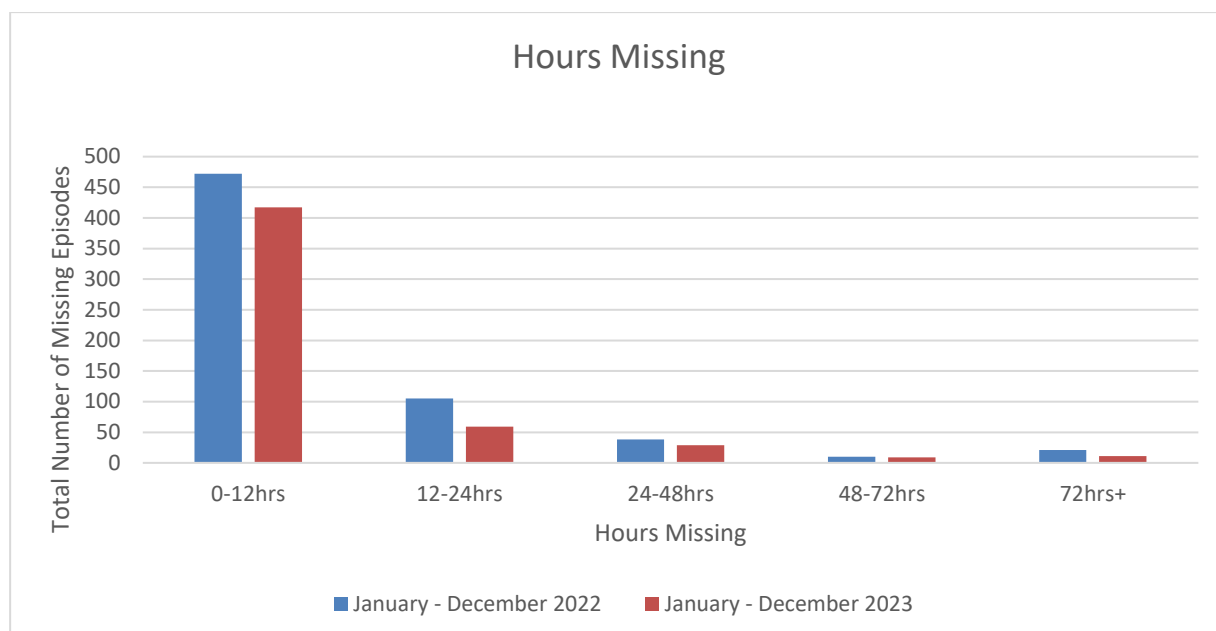
Most of the young people who go missing are deemed persistently missing children, where they have 3 or more missing episodes in 30 days. Of the 525 missing episodes, the graph below demonstrates that 33 young people equates to total of 452 missing episodes.



Young people who are regular missing are supported by a variety of mechanisms and the missing protocol and processes are implemented. Using individual support meetings and the multi-agency monthly missing monitoring meeting analysis of the missing episodes are reviewed and attempts are made to disrupt and keep these young people safe through disruption and safety plans.

For many of the missing episodes the amount of time a young person is missing is 0-12hrs and this has remained the same trend as the previous year and is in line with cases open to social care and early help for the city.

6.3



Top 10 Persistently Missing Children for January – December 2023

These young people identify as the top 10 missing children are those who are looked after and residing in a variety of settings. Many of the missing episodes for all these young people took place at various stages of the year. Many of them now, apart from one, has had significant reduction in their missing episodes and for some they are no longer reported as missing.

The table below is the top 10 persistently missing looked after children:

Young Person	No of episodes	Placement type	Overview
Male 14 years	67	DCC Residential	Significantly settled down over the winter months. Many of the missing episodes were there spring/ summer and went missing as a group of 4 from residential homes.
Male 16 years	32	LAC DCC placed out of area	Have reduced and placement is stable.
Male 16 years	30	DCC Residential	Went missing as a group of 4 from the residential homes. The missing episodes have significantly reduced compared to the summer/ spring.
Female 16 years	30	DCC Residential	Went missing as a group of 4 from the residential homes. The missing episodes have significantly reduced compared to the summer/ spring.
Male 16 years	29	LAC DCC placed out of area	Was going missing and being found with dad in Birmingham. This has been assessed and is now residing with dad but is still subject to LAC status.

			Missing episodes have stopped.
Female 17 years	29	DCC Residential	Went missing as a group of 4 from the residential homes. The missing episodes have significantly reduced compared to the summer/ spring.
Male 17 years	19	LAC DCC placed out of area and independent residential	Was placed in a secure placement for a period and has since broke his legs and is undergoing rehab. Missing episodes have reduced significantly.
Male 17 years	15	DCC in Semi independent	Now has a settled placement, missing episodes reduced.
Female 15 years	14	LAC DCC placed out of area	Was going missing with peers, missing episodes have reduced since being placed out of area.
Female 16 years	14	LAC DCC placed out of area and LAC DCC in Semi independent	Is now settled in semi-independent living and majority of missing episodes were when in residential care.

6.4 As can be seen from the table above, many of persistent missing episodes are often due to a small cohort placed in within DCC residential homes, all having their own vulnerabilities. However, the residential staff have built strong relationships with these young people, understood there needs and a mapping exercise was completed to determine the nature of the group and if other outside factors were contributing to missing episodes and if there were any ways, we could disrupt these missing episodes through positive peer relationships and activities, which have now been achieved.

Primary Reasons for young people going missing.

The top Primary reason for children going missing for this reported period were:

Relationships - To have contact with family and friends
Home and Care – Pushing of boundaries and rules
Home and Care - Breakdown of Communication
Mental Health
CCE
Behaviour – Inappropriate Peer Groups
Breakdown of LAC placement

6.5 The main reason given by young people who were reported missing was to have contact with family and friends and this would be expected in line with the number of missing for young people who are looked after and the amount of time missing.

The pushing of boundaries and rules and breakdown of communication is also in line with the 4 young people who were in the top 10 young people for going missing, as they were going

missing as a peer group and pushing the boundaries set by the residential home and often remained local to the area and were not missing for very long.

Locations found and how they returned:

Locations of where a young person has been whilst missing and their locations when found are recorded and the top locations are:

- A) Derbion
- B) River Gardens
- C) Bus stations
- D) Parks which include Sinfen Park, Caxton Park, Stockbrook Park and Markeaton Park
- E) Private addresses where it is thought house parties are taking place.

The Derbion appears to be a key place for young people, who use this to meet with peers, stay warm inside and buy food. Often young people will spend a large amount of time in the food quarter area.

These locations are highlighted in the monthly missing monitoring meeting and raised at police led high risk exploitation and missing meetings. Appropriate referrals and resources are utilised from the youth alliance, community safety partnership and local SNT to support in disrupting these areas, engaging young people in positive activities, and making these areas safe for young people and the wider community.

How young people return to their home/ placement from their missing episodes is monitored to determine a trend and attempt to utilise family and friends as part of the safety plan to reduce missing episodes (this data is from April 2023 onwards when this was incorporated within the return interview):

	Return of own accord	Police	Parents/carers	Other – School/member of public etc
April – June	78 Episodes	22 Episodes	29 Episodes	2 Episodes
July – Sep	62 Episodes	41 Episodes	36 Episodes	0 Episodes
Oct – Dec	63 Episodes	33 episodes	36 Episodes	1 Episode
total	203 Episodes	96 Episodes	101 Episodes	3 Episodes

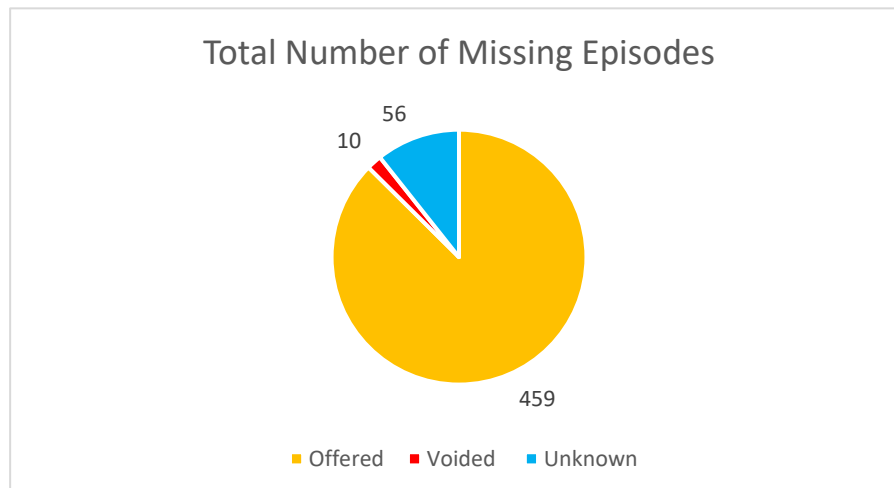
Returning of their own accord is the highest method, as stated previous many looked after children go missing and remain in the local area or in the city centre and return when they get cold, tired, or bored (which they state).

Where the police have returned them to their placement is it often when they have found them within the community, or the young person will contact the police to return them to their setting. Family will often phone the placement settings to inform them if the child is with them and often staff will collect and return them to their placements. Where it is assessed, the young person is often reported missing and with family, this is reviewed and attempts to make this structured contact and build a rapport between placement settings and family to reduce missing episodes.

6.6 Return Interviews

As part of the updating of the return interview and the review of the missing protocol, Derby has started to report on the amount of return interviews offered and the amount accepted of declined in line with Ofsted requirements. However, where there are safeguarding concerns, a return interview must be completed.

Of the 525 missing episodes, the table below demonstrates the statutory compliance on ensuring return interviews are offered:



Of the 515, 56 are unknown and this is due to the allocated worker not completing the return interviews on the system, this mainly comes from the last quarter (October – December).

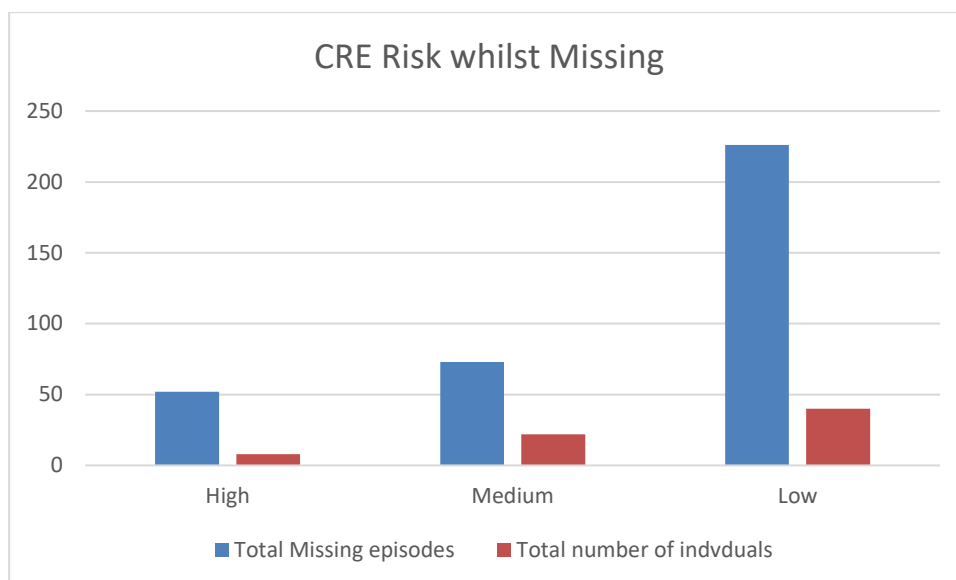
Of the 459 return interviews offered, 357 were accepted and 174 were declined. Of the 357 return interviews accepted 351 were completed within the 72hr timescale. The 52 that appear out of timescales, is often due to the young person being reported missing again before the allocated worker can visit and undertake the return interview process.

The missing performance and tracking co-ordinator is supporting individual social workers in completing the “Incomplete” return interviews. As often social workers are contacting a young person and recording this, but not using the correct recording process.

6.7 Exploitation Risk and Missing

The level of risk around exploitation whilst missing is considered when completing a return interview if the young person engages or declines a return interview. The missing episode and the history of the young person is taken into consideration when completing the CRE risk analysis.

Out of the 351 return interviews completed:



The majority of looked after children would appear to present as low risk when missing and this would support the reason why young people are looked after, is to be and see family.

Where there is a high and medium risk, these young people are often being supported for risks on exploitation and are sitting within the right safeguarding format. However, for each missing episode further support is offered and a richer picture of trends including what time young people go missing, where they are found, who they were with. In certain cases police will track phones and mapping exercises will be completed as a multi-agency response.

Challenges

- 7.0 Looked after children who go missing have severe and complex needs. Many can go through several placements for a variety of reasons, but at times a placement sufficiency can be an issue and can impact on missing episodes. This is a national trend around placement sufficiency.
- 7.1 Within this reporting period those who were deemed persistently missing went missing as a group and due to the complexities of the individuals this took a long time to build relationships and understand the peer group, which caused a high number of missing episodes.
- 7.2 For many looked after children they are repeatedly missing and often, they will gravitate towards a previous placement or family.
- 7.3 There remains a high number of Return Interviews to complete with young people and the volume has and continues to present a challenge to Social Workers to keep abreast of these. This is often a compliance issue, as Social Workers understand the missing patterns and risk factors associated with children, they are case managing. Nevertheless, there is a statutory need to maintain completion of Return Interviews for all missing episodes.

Next Steps

- 8.0 Audit the quality of return interviews and disruption plans following the implementation of the new return interview and good practice standards of holding a missing intervention meeting with a focus on disruption.

- 8.1 Work with children in care teams around the completion of return interviews in statutory timescales.
- 8.2 Take the missing safety plan to the children in care council for feedback and make any appropriate changes.

Public/stakeholder engagement

- 9.0 There have been regular meetings between the police, Children in Care and the missing team around how we can best support our young people and colleagues in residential homes.
- 9.1 The Missing Person's Monitoring Group following consultation with partners has included elements of Place based Risk and Disruptive strategies to best measure the direction of travel of these young people.
- 9.2 The Missing Strategic continues to monitor the progress and implement new actions for the missing action plan in line with the needs of the young people and works in accordance with the missing protocol.

Other options

- 10.0 No other options exist for consideration within the scope of the report.

Financial and value for money issues

- 11. There are no financial issues, as there is no funding attached to the missing action plan or the missing protocol. We have had to utilise the resources of the partnership to skill up staff, develop the action plan, ensure appropriate training, and review progress.
- 11. There has been an investment into the children in care team for a children's practitioner to focus on persistently missing children.

Legal implications

- 9.0 No other legal implications.

Climate Implications

- 12.0 No climate implications

Other significant implications

- 13.0 No other significant implications

This report has been approved by the following people:

Role	Name	Date of sign-off
Legal	Olu Idowu	1 st Feb 2024
Finance	Alison Parkin	2 nd Feb 2024
Service Director(s)	Suanne Lim	2 nd Feb 2024
Report sponsor	Suanne Lim	2 nd Feb 2024
Other(s)	NA	

Background papers:
List of appendices: