

MAJOR SCRUTINY REVIEW: SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN WHO ARE REPORTED MISSING

Cabinet Member	Councillor David Simmonds
Cabinet Portfolio	Education and Children's Services
Officer Contact	Khalid Ahmed, Administration Directorate
Papers with report	Appendix A: Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee Final Report

HEADLINE INFORMATION

Purpose of report	To receive the Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee report on the review on Safeguarding Children Who are Reported Missing.
Contribution to our plans and strategies	Putting residents first, keeping children safe.
Financial Cost	There is no increase to current costs if the recommendations of this report are agreed. The recommendations will be implemented by officers.
Relevant Scrutiny Committee(s)	Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee
Ward(s) affected	N/A

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

- 1. Welcomes the attached report of the Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee on the review into Safeguarding Children who are Reported Missing.**
- 2. Accepts the recommendations of the Policy Overview Committee as reflected below.**
- 3. Notes with concern the recent decision by Home Office Ministers to delay interviewing Children and Young People arriving at UK borders to claim asylum as a result of the "Landing in Dover report". In addition, Cabinet notes that following the matter being brought to the Home Secretary's attention by the Deputy Leader of Hillingdon Council, the Home Office has confirmed that full implementation of the decision has been delayed.**

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

RECOMMENDATION 1 – That the written guidance for staff in residential homes on what to do if a child goes missing from care, be revised and reinforced, to ensure that the information shared with the Police incorporates all information needed to help find / trace a missing child, including mobile phone numbers, oyster card numbers and known addresses.

RECOMMENDATION 2 – That the written guidance should also be extended to all staff working in private care homes, voluntary care homes and semi-independent units for children in the Borough.

RECOMMENDATION 3 – That the Local Safeguarding Children's Board be asked to extend multi-agency training on missing children to foster carers and residential staff from the private, voluntary sector and semi-independent units in the Borough.

RECOMMENDATION 4 – That the Metropolitan Police public protection desk in the Borough be asked to produce biennial statistics on the prevalence of children reported missing from the six "care homes" across the Borough and if possible extend this to include all foster placements placed in the Borough by other local authorities.

RECOMMENDATION 5 – That officers be asked to explore the findings of the review and investigate the feasibility of adopting the following:

- To explore the viability of introducing a system of dealing with children who were repeatedly reported missing without involving the Police in the first instance.
- To investigate the use of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) as a means through which to share intelligence on missing children and ultimately, to reduce the number of children going missing from care. Included in the MASH should be a representative from Education who could provide information on Looked after Children who were not attending school.
- To explore the possibility of the mobile youth services bus being made accessible for children in all local authority, private and voluntary organisations care homes.
- To consider the possibility of harmonising the terminology used with regards to missing people across all organisations in Hillingdon. This would help to ensure that the reporting of cases and collection of useful data would be improved and made more accurate.
- For the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) to review statistics on children missing from care in the Borough twice annually.

INFORMATION

Reasons for recommendation

The objective of the review was to look at the statutory duties of the Council and partner agencies with regard to children and young people who are reported missing and to review local practice as it reflects national policy and guidance.

Alternative options considered / risk management

The Cabinet could decide to reject or amend one or more of the Committee's recommendations.

Supporting Information

The Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee held meetings on 12 September and 10 October 2012, when background information and evidence was received to help the Committee in forming their findings.

The terms of reference of the review was as follows:

- To learn about national policy and statutory guidance relating to children who are reported missing.
- To learn about the research relating to children who run away, or who are reported missing.
- To understand the reporting arrangements for data about children missing at national level.
- To understand the local reporting arrangements for collecting data on children reported missing in Hillingdon.
- To learn about best practice initiatives for safeguarding children reported missing across the country, and in other local authorities and partner agencies.
- To review the practice around safeguarding children reported missing in the locality of Hillingdon.
- To be updated about the arrangements for safeguarding vulnerable children who may go missing at a port of entry; and to understand the data related to Heathrow Airport as a port of entry.
- After due consideration of the above, to bring forward positive and practical policy recommendations (if needed), in relation to the Council's approach to children reported missing from care.

The Committee heard from the Council's Service Manager for Safeguarding Children and Reviewing Service, the Council's Training and Developing Manager for Safeguarding, Detective Inspector Graham Hamilton from the Missing Persons' Unit, Steve White, Manager of Hillingdon's Children's Resource Centre (Mulberry Parade) and Marie Fleming, Youth Worker and Manager of Fountains Mill.

Key issues, which were identified in the review, were:

- Going missing is a key indicator that a child may be at risk of abuse or exploitation. When children do go missing, they are often at very serious risk of significant harm in the form of physical abuse, sexual exploitation, trafficking or neglect.
- There has been recent publicity on the need to protect these vulnerable children. For example, the media interest in the Rochdale case and the Derby serious case review are examples of this societal concern and the possible relationship with gangs, etc. The Children's Commissioner has been asked by Government to conduct a national survey of the prevalence of gang activity and children going missing can be an indicator of serious crime being committed in an organised way.
- There have been problems associated with the police data and local authority data around the prevalence of children who are reported missing during any year, not only missing from the care system but also missing from parental care in the community. It is

estimated by the police that 10,000 individual children are reported missing in a year, but this does not seem to be reflected in the data collected by Local Safeguarding Children's Boards or by other national bodies such as the Department for Education.

- The remit of this review was to cover the issues relating to data collection at the national and local level and also the implications for practice and the intelligence that should be shared to help protect and safeguard Hillingdon's children.

As Members will be aware, Hillingdon Council takes its duties in protecting children trafficked into the UK very seriously. In the early part of 2012, the Children's Commissioner produced a report, called 'Landing in Dover'. In that report, the Children's Commissioner highlighted some of the tensions and difficulties experienced by children and young people arriving through the Port of Dover to claim asylum. The Children's Commissioner recommended that the Border Agency (UKBA) should delay the interviewing of children in Dover, in respect of their asylum claim, until a period of some days had elapsed, to allow the child/young person to recover from their journey and secure legal representation. The Council has strong concerns that this will dramatically increase the risk of trafficked children going undetected at the UK Border.

Hillingdon was informed in February 2013 that this would come into force at all points of entry from 25th February 2013. The Deputy Leader of the Council has since written to the Home Secretary and has been informed that this will not come into effect at Heathrow at this moment in time. The Deputy Leader will update Cabinet once further discussions have taken place.

The Children's commissioner's report can be found here
http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications/content_556

Financial Implications

There are no additional costs associated with the recommendations of this report. The work will be carried out by officers currently employed. If the reviews recommended in this report result in new commitments for London Borough of Hillingdon then further approval will be needed in accordance with the usual authorisation channels.

EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

What will be the effect of the recommendation?

The recommendations, if agreed, will improve the partnership work in relation to Missing Children and in particular improve practice, procedures and intelligence to help protect and safeguard Hillingdon's children.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

The Committee took evidence from a range of witnesses as described in the review report.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and notes that there are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations set out above.

Legal

Part III of the Children Act 1989 underpins the Council's statutory duties towards children and young persons in its area and those who are 'looked after' by it. There is a general duty to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Under the Council's Constitution Cabinet has the appropriate power to agree recommendations proposed at the outset of this report. Further, by virtue of Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 which makes provision for 'a general power of competence' for local authorities in England. The 'power' gives local authorities the power to do anything an individual can do unless specifically prohibited by law. This includes the power to act in the interest of their communities.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL