

Report of the Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee 2012/13

Safeguarding Children Who are Reported Missing



Members of the Committee

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Chairman's Foreword



I am delighted to present this review on the Safeguarding of Children who are reported missing. When children go missing there is a real risk that they could be subjected to abuse or exploitation and this has been recently highlighted in cases in Rochdale and Derby. Added to this is that children that have gone missing are sometimes involved in organised crime and gang activity.

The review looked at the procedures which are in place for the collection of both police and local authority data around the prevalence of children who are reported missing during any year and to ensure this data is as accurate as possible. It is estimated by the police that nationally there are 10,000 individual children 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 review heard evidence on the issues relating to data collection at national and local level; and listened to the views expressed by the witnesses on what measures could be taken to improve procedures and practices to ensure all agencies share data on missing children.

I would like to thank the external witnesses and officers for participating in the review and ask that Cabinet kindly consider the recommendations contained in the report.

Catherine Dann

Councillor Catherine Dann
Chairman of the Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following its review the Education and Children's Services Policy Overview Committee has made the following recommendations to Cabinet:

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 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.**

BACKGROUND

OBJECTIVES

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.

The terms of reference of the review were 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.

To meet the objectives of the review Members 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 information, evidence and findings of the review are set out in the next sections under the following headings:

1. Information and analysis.
2. Evidence and enquiry.
3. Recommendations.

INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS

In June 2012, an All-Party Parliamentary Group published findings into its enquiry into children missing from care. This initiative was supported by the Children's Society and other non-Governmental organisations with an interest in safeguarding children.¹

The Policy Overview Committee conducted a review in Hillingdon on child trafficking in 2009/2010; and asked to be updated in the future about progress relating to children who had been reported missing after arriving at the airport. This review brought together both the national initiatives around children missing from care; alongside the local issues which arise due to the close proximity of Heathrow Airport. The intention of the review was to provide reassurance to the local Council members about Hillingdon's responsibilities for safeguarding vulnerable children who may be at risk, as a consequence of running away, or repeatedly going missing.

The review received reports, presentations, supplementary handouts, and heard from witnesses about the issues relating to children missing; both in Hillingdon and more widely across the London region.

Data was supplied along with an analysis of the issues to enable members to understand the difficulties in using data to properly depict the prevalence of this issue as a local and national trend.

The review also received documentation relating to research on children missing from care, and its links to serious case reviews such as the recent ones in Rochdale and Derby, where children were sexually exploited whilst being reported missing from care.

Key Issues

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.

Very recently there has been 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 (Tim Loughton) 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.

1

http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/u32/joint_appg_inquiry_report...pdf

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.

EVIDENCE & ENQUIRY

Witness sessions for the review were held on the 12 September and 10 October 2012 when the Committee heard from the following:

- 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)
- Marie Fleming, Youth Worker and Manager of Fountains Mill

Safeguarding Arrangements for Children Missing from Care

The Committee was informed that the Local Safeguarding Children Board has developed a 3 tier model to address the issue of children being reported missing from care. At a strategic level, the Local Safeguarding Children Board (main Board meeting comprising core agencies and attended by senior managers) receives data relating to children who have been reported missing in the local area, and also children who may be at risk of trafficking and going missing after arrival at Heathrow airport.

A secondary tier of response includes a number of sub-groups which have been created for middle managers, both in the local authority and across partner agencies, to determine policy and levels of response to key issues relating to children reported missing, or likely to be at risk of exploitation and trafficking. These sub-groups meet 6 times a year, and also include representatives from non-Governmental organisations such as ECPAT (End Child Prostitution and Trafficking), the NSPCC, Action for Children and CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection).

At the operational level, there are regular multi-agency meetings to examine the intelligence relating to children reported missing, both those who arrive through the airport and those who are reported missing within the locality of Hillingdon. The Operational Meeting relating to the airport includes representatives from the Heathrow Intelligence Unit, Paladin (law enforcement) representatives from the UK Border Agency (UKBA) and also the local authority. This examines potential indicators for when children who have newly arrived through the airport terminals, could be at risk of being trafficking or going missing. This multi-agency response has helped to reduce considerably the number of children going missing, since the last review by the Policy Overview Committee in 2009/2010.

In addition, there is a multi-agency operational meeting which meets 8 times per year, to discuss all the children and young people who have been reported missing to the local police Missing Persons Unit based in West

Drayton. The purpose of this meeting is to share information about possible indicators of exploitation; and share intelligence about other possible gang related issues or exposure to criminal activity.

Both the operational meetings mentioned above have a remit to create a risk management plan for each individual child, to ensure that the safeguarding needs of these children are kept paramount through regular de-briefings and feedback within the professional network.

The Terms of Reference for these operational groups do include membership from local providers who look after children within Hillingdon's boundaries. (Eg Blandford House, Elm Tree Unit etc).

The work of these operational groups and this 3 tiered model has been officially recognised by the Home Office in its strategy for addressing child trafficking, and also in the allied guidance for this purpose. In addition, representatives from Hillingdon were called as witnesses at the recent All Party Parliamentary Select Committee on children missing from care.

The Terms of Reference for the multi-agency groups are maintained on the Local Safeguarding Children Board website along with other information for professionals, who need to be mindful of the risks associated with children going missing from care.

<http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=15535>

What we know about children that go missing

The review was provided with background to the statistics behind children that go missing.

- 38% return within one night
- 75% of children return home in 48 hours
- 90% were found after 5 days
- 16% were gone for 4 weeks
- 50% go missing more than once
- 20% go missing three times or more

In terms of gender, boys run away from a younger age (pre-teens), whilst teenage girls run away more frequently than boys. The review was informed that in relation to ethnicity, in terms of absolute numbers, most runaways were white British, however, children from ethnic minorities were proportionately over represented.

One of the reasons that there were concerns about missing children was that whilst they were missing statistics showed that there was a chance that they would be involved in crime, were victims of crime and were subjected to sexual exploitation and serious organised abuse. Statistically an enormous amount of young people who go missing were hurt on the one or last occasion

they ran away (11%), 1 in 8 were physically hurt, 1 in 9 were sexually assaulted and 1 in 5 stole, begged or did other things to survive whilst missing.

Statistics showed that a half of 16-17 year old runaways were homeless; 1 in 6 runaways slept rough or with a stranger while away; 45% with friends and 36% were more likely to stay with other family members because they were more likely to be forced to leave.

Statistics showed that of the total of people that went missing, 36% were adults, 30% were aged 15-17 and the rest were other children under the age of 15.

The Committee was informed that the general reasons of why children went missing was running away from problems or conflict at home or at school, trafficked children or children who were part of organised abuse and children who had been abducted by a family member or a stranger.

In relation to home circumstances, 81% of runaways went to live with a parent, partner, carer or relative, 25% were forced to leave and some, especially girls were groomed by strangers.

An area which was of great concern was that statistically, 70% of children who ran away overnight were never reported to the Police.

Prevention

The most important way to prevent children from running away was to find out the reasons for why they had run away. This could be done by carrying out return interviews. The Committee was informed that the independent and voluntary sector had an important role to play in this, as children would be much more likely to speak to someone independent.

At a national level, steps had been taken to strengthen the arrangements to support missing children. Responsibility had been transferred to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre.

CEOP Preventative programmes would take place in schools such as "Thinkuknow" which would send a prevention message directly to children and young people on risks around going missing.

With regard to training, CEOP would focus training and best practice advice for police on identifying risks and on the consequences of a child or young person going missing.

Reference was made to the Department of Education who collected information on the number of Looked after Children who had gone missing for more than 24 hours.

Prevention at a local level

The strategic guidance suggested that for prevention at a local level, local authorities should:

- Identify places where children go missing from
- The Local Safeguarding Children's Board to create a multi-agency response plan
- Identify high risk individuals through local partnerships

The Committee was informed that there were difficulties with cross boundary issues within Hillingdon. There were providers in other local authority areas that looked after Hillingdon children and vice versa. Regular multi-agency meetings took place, including with care homes, to ensure numbers correlated. The challenge for the authorities was to find the numbers of those children who had not been reported as gone missing.

Particular mention was made of the work this Council had done in relation to children and young people who had gone missing after arriving in the country. Between 2007 and 2009, 79 young people had gone missing from care shortly after arriving in the country. Many of these children were potential child trafficking victims. An operation model was established, working in partnership with law enforcement agencies, based on multi-agency working and pro-active identification of risks. This Council's approach had significantly reduced the number of potentially trafficked children going missing, and reference had been made to this work in the Government Strategy document on Missing Children and Adults.

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

The Local Safeguarding Children's Board provided training to all agencies to understand the roles and responsibilities when children suffered harm when they had gone missing. Reference was made to effective multi-agency information sharing which would come on-line at the end of the year, and which would greatly improve information about families. This was called the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

At a national level, the Government would ensure national capability added value by means of the Missing Persons Bureau and CEOP having processes in place to review cases. In addition the statutory guidance on children who runaway or go missing from care would be revised to give local authorities a clearer understanding of their duties. Local authorities would now have to make regular reports to Council Members with responsibility for Corporate Parenting on patterns of children gone missing from care.

Reference was made to the Child Rescue Alert system which would be used to send out information to other colleagues and agencies nationwide about concerns regarding young people who had gone missing.

The Committee expressed some concern on the numbers of children and young people which went missing in the Borough and that the data which the

Council received, only detailed the number of Looked after Children who went missing. The Police had details of the number of total children and young people who went missing, but this was for Greater London.

The Committee noted that the CEOP would improve the data on missing children. The point was reiterated that not all the incidents of children and young people who had gone missing, were reported.

The MASH hub would also provide better data, with all relevant agencies feeding their information into the hub. Particular mention was made to those children who missed school and the review was reassured that operational meetings took place monthly between officers from education and safeguarding officers so information was shared.

The Committee asked whether it would be appropriate for the Youth Offending Service to be represented at these operational meetings to ensure as much information as possible was shared by agencies.

Reference was also made to the need to secure formal arrangements with the Borough's Academy schools, to ensure that information on missing children was shared with the local authority.

In relation to Looked after Children and education, particularly secondary education, reference was made to whether there was adequate communication between schools and the relevant agencies with regard to Looked after Children who did not attend school.

Missing Person's Unit

A Police representative from the Missing Persons' Unit attended one of the witness sessions and provided the Committee with background information and statistics on the problem of missing children.

The Committee was informed that comparisons between the periods 1 September 2010 – 31 August 2011 and 1 September 2011 – 31 August 2012 had showed an increase from 18% to 20% in the proportion of missing children in the Borough being made up of children in care. These figures were made up from children at 6 residential care homes in the Borough.

An additional 5% of missing children were made up from residential care homes in the Borough which housed children from outside of the area. In the first period there had been 286 reported missing children compared to 327 in the latter period. However, it was noted that these figures were largely made up of children who were repeatedly reported missing. One child had been recorded as missing 33 times in a single year.

The Police representative reported that the search for missing children did have a significant impact upon Police resources with substantial financial implications.

Hillingdon had seen 22 high risk cases over the last 12 month period with 8 of these being made up of children from residential care homes.

Concern was expressed at the lack of information the Police had on those neighbouring local authority Looked after Children who were placed within the Borough's children's homes, together with the unaccompanied children who arrived at Heathrow.

Youth Worker and Manager of Fountain Mills

The Manager of Fountains Mills and Youth Worker informed the Committee that she worked with children and young people from the age of 11 to 21, but her primary focus was on 13-19 age group.

Many of the children and young people she worked with had complex needs and she often signposted them to other services. In her experience, the majority of children who run away from home have done so because of conflict in the home. Part of her role was providing mediation with the children and their families.

Feedback from the children she worked with was that they needed practical support; they needed something to do and somewhere to go.

Many children who have run away from home have required practical assistance such as guidance on how to open a bank account and so on. It was the opinion of the Youth Worker that some of these children also often require mentoring.

Much of the support and services offered by voluntary sector organisations could not be accessed by children in care homes because they were often unable or unwilling to use public transport. This could be an area where some improvement was needed.

Reference was made to the mobile youth service bus which was used to engage with young people and get them involved in activities. This service could also be used for children in care homes and could be an opportunity for positive engagement and interaction of these children.

Registered Manager from Children's Home

The Registered Manager from this authority's Mulberry Parade informed the Committee that many of the children that his establishment cared for, were unaccompanied children who had arrived at Heathrow Airport. These children often presented a different set of issues and problems to other children.

The point was made that it was not simply a case of children going missing from care homes, because of the care home environment, he advised that a large proportion of children had runaway from home before becoming Looked after Children so there was sometimes already a problem.

Many of the children who were reported missing were not connected to any wider community such as a church group or scouts etc, which increased their isolation.

Children who run away from care generally had a troubled background and had problems with their families in the past. These children have also usually had a troubled time in the education system. It was noted that these children often find it difficult to make the transition from primary to secondary education.

Many children who were repeatedly reported missing have made a lifestyle choice and have decided to move towards gaining independence. It was noted that this is especially true for older children in care who were preparing to leave care in the near future.

An important point was made that the Council only manages 2 of the 6 children's homes in the Borough with the other 4 being run by private and voluntary sector organisations. This meant that communication was often difficult and different protocols were used.

The Committee was concerned that some of the cases of children going missing from residential care homes, were reported to the Police, even if they were known to be at a social event and likely to return. It was acknowledged by both the Police and Home Manager that this process created a significant amount of paperwork which is often unnecessary due to a child's return.

Regular, multi-agency meetings took place to discuss cases involving missing children which was proving to be an effective way to manage and share information on issues relating to missing children. This was good practice and was commended by the Committee.

Findings

The Committee having considered the evidence provided suggested the following findings which could be worked up into recommendations.

1. There should be implementation of written guidance for staff in all children's residential homes (local authority, private and voluntary) on what to do if a child goes missing from care to ensure the information was shared with the Police. This could include the possibility of "grab packs" being put together for every child entering a care home. This would be an up-to-date file on the child with their telephone number, information on who they socialised with, where they socialised and what their history of running away was. This would provide a valuable resource for Police looking for the missing child and could lead to significant time and financial efficiencies.
2. It should also be investigated whether there was a possibility of requiring Local Authorities which placed out-of-Borough children in residential care homes in Hillingdon to provide a "grab pack" as outlined above.
3. Multi-agency training could be given on the procedure for dealing with missing children to foster carers and residential staff from both private and voluntary children's care homes within the Borough.
4. To review biennial statistics on missing children from the six children's care homes in the Borough, and if possible from all foster placements within the Borough, placed by other local authorities. This would include data broken down in detail and qualitative data such as why the child ran away from care.
5. To explore the viability of a system of dealing with children who were repeatedly reported missing without involving the Police in the first instance.
6. 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.
7. To explore the possibility of using the youth service bus to bring the support and services offered by voluntary sector organisations to children in care homes.
8. 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.
9. For the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) to review statistics on children missing from care in the Borough twice annually.

10. In relation to education, and particularly secondary education, reference was made to whether there was adequate communication between schools and the relevant agencies with regard to Looked after Children who did not attend school. This could also form part of the MASH network

Background Reading

The help Members with their review reference was made to a wide-ranging selection of background information.

- Report from the joint enquiry into children who go missing from care (June 2012 – APPG)

http://s3.amazonaws.com/rcpp/assets/attachments/1461_joint_appg_inquiry_report.._original.pdf

- DCSF (2009) Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home and care

<http://www.education.gov.uk/search/results?q=statutory+guidance+on+children+who+run+away+and+go+missing+from+home+care>

- London Child Protection Procedures – Version 4 – supplementary procedures on safeguarding children who go missing from home or care

http://www.londonscb.gov.uk/procedures/supplementary_procedures.html

- Barnados (2012) *Cutting them free* : How is the UK progressing in protecting its children from sexual exploitation

http://www.barnardos.org.uk/get_involved/campaign/cutthemfree.htm

- Barnados (2011) What's going on to safeguard children and young people from sexual exploitation? – Jago,

http://www.barnardos.org.uk/news_and_events/media_centre/press_releases/press_releases_archive.htm?ref=73573

- CEOP (2011) Child trafficking update – strategic threat assessment

http://ceop.police.uk/Documents/ceopdocs/child_trafficking_update_2011.pdf

- The Children's Society (2011) *Make runaways safe launch report*

<http://makerunawayssafe.org.uk/>

- DfE (March 2012) Children's homes in England – data pack

<http://www.education.gov.uk/search/results?q=childrens+homes+in+england+data+pack>

- DfE (March 2010) *The Children Act 1989: Guidance and regulations, Volume 2, Care Planning, placement and case review* – London: HM Government

<http://www.education.gov.uk/search/results?q=children+act+1989+volume+2+care+planning>

- ACPO Guidance on the management, recording and investigations of missing persons (2010) NPIA

<http://www.acpo.police.uk/documents/crime/2011/201103CRIIMP02.pdf>

- Rochdale – serious case review – executive summary
- Derby – serious case review – executive summary 2011

http://www.google.co.uk/search?q=derby+serious+case+review&hl=en&gbv=2&gs_l=hp.1.1.0i2j0i5l4j0i5i30j0i8l3.1125.7391.0.10735.12.9.0.3.3.0.187.1016.3j6.9.0...0.0.iHX8vwLPohs&oq=derby+serious+cas

- Child sexual exploitation – Government Action Plan – 2011 – Tim Loughton
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<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/c/tackling%20child%20sexual%20exploitation%20-%20action%20plan.pdf>

- ‘Puppet on a String’

http://www.barnardos.org.uk/ctf_puppetonastring_report_final.pdf

- Missing children – ECPAT

<http://www.ecpat.org.uk/content/missing-children-dalals-story>