

**14 October 2013****Agenda Item: 7****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE****CHILDREN WHO GO MISSING FROM HOME OR CARE: END OF YEAR  
REPORT 2012/13****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of the report is to update members of the Committee on the activity and progress relating to children who go missing from home or care within Nottinghamshire during 2012-13. The report highlights accomplishments during the year and the priorities for 2013-14. These priorities will build on the strong foundations within Nottinghamshire as this area of work has been invested in and been a priority for both Children's Social Care and the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board (NSCB).

**Information and Advice****Background**

2. A brief definition of a missing child is one *'who is absent from their home or placement without permission for any length of time where their age, experience, background or ability make this a concern'* (NSCB Protocol). The Police definition adopted within Nottinghamshire is that a missing person is one *'whose whereabouts are unknown, whatever the circumstances of disappearance. He or she will be considered missing until located and his or her wellbeing, or otherwise, established'* (ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers) / NSCB Protocol). The ACPO guidance has recently been revised and the Department for Education Statutory Guidance is being reviewed; this will result in the NSCB protocol being updated in due course to take into account both revisions.
3. The issue of children who go missing from home or care is a safeguarding issue as some children who go missing may be at risk of or suffering from harm due to going missing. Children from all backgrounds may run away in response to problems that are making them unhappy or feel unsafe. There are also clear links between child sexual exploitation and going missing which are taken into account in the work we do. Children who go missing from care are clearly a specific group of children who are of concern as they are particularly vulnerable.
4. The Children's Society research (2011 Still Running 3) indicates that running away is still a problem nationally and it thus remains a priority for the NSCB.

5. A wealth of local data relating to missing children is collated quarterly with the aim of developing understanding and analysis around the subject of missing children. An accompanying presentation will show some of the detail that is available and work is ongoing to improve our understanding and apply the information usefully. It is regretful that there is no national data which would enable national or local comparison but research by Ofsted and the voluntary sector provides an opportunity for a degree of practice comparison.
6. The information from research and the Nottinghamshire data available would indicate that the work around children who go missing within Nottinghamshire is positive and that the work is developing and progressing.

## **Governance**

7. The strategy and the development of missing children work is undertaken through a multi-agency steering group. There has been quarterly reporting to the NSCB through the Performance and Quality Sub-Group and, as of this year, annually to the Board.

## **National and Local Strategy and Partnerships**

8. The local NSCB protocol '*Children Who Go Missing From, Home, Care or Education Protocol (2012)*' guides our work. The protocol derives from statutory guidance (2009) and from a Home Office strategy (2011). Work is also informed by a raft of guidance and research which either relates to or is closely aligned to child sexual exploitation.
9. All of the work around missing children is multi-agency; this is reflected in the steering group although the lead agencies are the Police and Children's Social Care.
10. Three main multi-agency, cross-authority training events were held during the 2012-13 which attracted a wide variety of participants and the subject is also regularly raised at other events i.e. NSCB 'What's New' events. More formal training is planned for 2013/14 when the DfE has revised the statutory guidance although there are ongoing briefings and information sharing meetings where possible.

## **Current Service Provision**

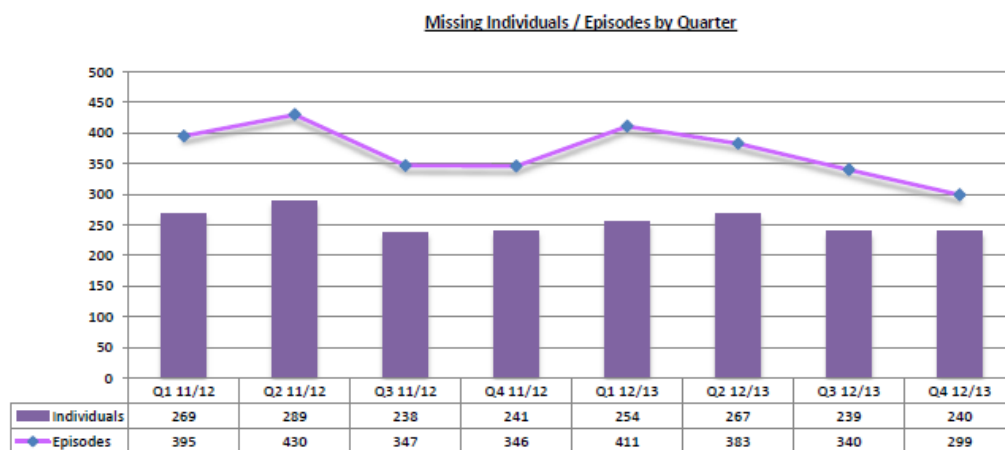
11. A clear process is followed once a child is reported missing; in brief:
  - the Police receive a call from a parent or carer to report a child missing
  - the Police visit the home or residence of the child and take a missing child report
  - Children's Social Care (CSC) is notified of the missing report (called an episode)
  - when the child is found the Police will complete a 'safe and well' check
  - where there is a delay in the child being found there is an ongoing dialogue between the Police and CSC Children Missing Officer (CMO)
  - CSC are sent a 'found' report by the Police
  - the CSC Children Missing Officer co-ordinates the request for a return interview or a multi-agency meeting from the relevant team
  - a worker will visit the child to complete the return interview and possibly co-ordinate a multi-agency meeting.

12. A return interview should be completed within 72 hours and is an opportunity for the young person to discuss why they have gone missing and for the worker to plan help and support. A multi-agency meeting is an opportunity for professionals to co-ordinate a response to the young person going missing and agree an appropriate plan.
  - a return interview is held when the young person has gone missing for the second time, or the first time if there are particular vulnerabilities identified or they have been missing for 24 hours
  - a multi-agency meeting will be held after the third time of going missing, or the young person has been missing for 72 hours or if they are engaged in risky behaviour.
13. In 2012/13 the majority of requests (57%) for return interviews were made to Children's Social Care with 6% to Targeted Support. 23% went to the Runaways Service which is a partnership between Catch 22 (a voluntary agency) and Targeted Support. The Runaways Service responds where the young person is not known to other services. The remaining 14% of requests went to Other Local Authorities who had children placed within Nottinghamshire boundaries, usually in private residential homes or independent foster placements.

## Data

14. The key findings for 2012/13 are as follows:

- there were 1,433 missing notifications (6% reduction on 2011/12)
- this related to 776 individual children (10% reduction on 2011/12)
- the number of children who go repeatedly missing appears to have decreased



- the gender of children who go missing is 50:50 male: female
- the ethnicity of children going missing roughly reflects the child population within Nottinghamshire
- the peak age range of children going missing is 13-17 years

- the percentage of children in the general population who went missing last year was approximately 0.5%. A higher percentage of children who are looked after go missing.
- data is being analysed to identify whether or not there are particular areas/hot spots where there is a higher or lower incidence of young people going missing
- the majority of Nottinghamshire children return home or to their placement within 24 hours
- the reasons young people give for going missing are varied but mostly about relationships with parents but also some school based issues or drug and alcohol factors

## **Main Achievements**

15. A comprehensive strategy and action plan has been completed which both reflects the work currently being done and that planned (**Appendix 1**).
16. We have improved on the recording and reporting of missing children.
17. The data indicates that the number of children going missing has reduced over the last year.
18. There has been an improvement in the completion of both return interview and multi-agency meeting compliance although this is something that we are determined to improve further. The majority of these interviews are done in a timely manner (within 72 hours). What works well however, and is a positive feature of the work we do, is the monitoring and tracking of this by the Children Missing Officer.
19. There is pro-active work to ensure that any Nottinghamshire child who is placed out of the County is responded to in the event that they go missing. This work will continue over the coming year. Details of the Nottinghamshire Looked After Children population, their placement types and geographical location are attached as **Appendix 2** and will be covered in the presentation.
20. Nottinghamshire has also been working with private providers of residential care homes and private fostering companies in Nottinghamshire and continues to work with other local authorities who have children placed in Nottinghamshire. This recognises that children placed at a distance from their home are potentially more vulnerable. It also recognises that from a multi-agency point of view Nottinghamshire Police have to respond to instances of children missing and that there may be a potential impact on Nottinghamshire as an Authority if there were to be significant incident of harm occurring to a child within our boundaries.

## **Key priorities for 2013/14**

21. There is a work plan for the coming year and the priorities are to:
  - review the NSCB missing children protocol in response to the anticipated revised Statutory Guidance

- improve the number of missing interviews completed
- improve the quality assurance work we do; particularly evaluating the quality of the return interview process and intervention in terms of the outcome for the child
- improve our engagement with young people to ensure their voice is heard
- ensure a more sophisticated analysis of the data, looking at 'hot spots' and repeat missing persons as well as understanding of any risk or harm the child has experienced
- monitor the use of disruption techniques by the police i.e. child abduction warning notices
- strengthen intelligence sharing processes with the police
- further develop work with the looked after children's teams including a focus on children placed out of the County.

### **Other Options Considered**

22. The report is for noting only.

### **Reason/s for Recommendation/s**

23. The report is for noting only.

### **Statutory and Policy Implications**

24. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, the public sector equality duty, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

### **Safeguarding of Children Implications**

25. The Children Missing from Home and Care protocol is issued under the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board procedures, the governance of which is through the NSCB.

### **RECOMMENDATION/S**

1) That the update on the activity relating to children who go missing from home or care within Nottinghamshire during 2012-13 and the progress made with regard to the response to those children who go missing from home or care be noted.

**Steve Edwards**

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## **Constitutional Comments**

26. As this report is for noting only, no Constitutional Comments are required.

## **Financial Comments (ZM 18/09/13)**

27. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

## **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Children who go missing from home, care or education protocol – Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board, 2012

Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care – DCSF Statutory Guidance, July 2009

Missing Children and Adults: A Cross Government Strategy – Home Office, December 2011

Still Running 3: early findings from our third national survey of runaways 2011 – Children's Society

Missing Children – Ofsted report, February 2013 (Ref No 120364)

Here to Listen? Return interviews provision for young runaways – The Children's Society, 2013

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

## **Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

All.

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