![Nottinghamshire County Council logo] **Nottinghamshire County Council**

Report to Children and Young People's Committee

14 July 2014

Agenda Item: 9

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

CHILDREN WHO GO MISSING FROM HOME OR CARE: END OF YEAR REPORT 2013/14

Purpose of the Report

1.   The purpose of the report is to update members on activity and progress relating to work regarding children missing from home or care within Nottinghamshire during 2013-14. The report reviews progress on the priorities identified for 2013/14 and identifies priorities for 2014-15.

Information and Advice

Background

2.   Children who go missing from home or care remain a vulnerable group and may come to harm in a variety of ways including through sexual exploitation. It continues to be recognised that looked after children remain a particularly vulnerable group of children.

3.   The governance of children missing from home or care is through a multi-agency steering group which meets quarterly and reports to the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board (NSCB).

4.   The local authority, with partner agencies, continues to robustly respond to children who are reported to the police as missing from home and care. The local authority is able evidence many aspects of this work through comprehensive data collection and analysis.

National and Local Strategy and Partnerships

5.   In January 2014 the Department for Education published revised 'Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care' which incorporated the Association of Chief Police Officers guidance (April 2013). As a result, the local NSCB inter-agency protocol *Children Who Go Missing From Home, Care or Education (2012*) is in the process of being revised and is due to be completed by July 2014. The local strategy and action plan has also been revised to reflect the changes.

6.   One of the most significant changes arising from the revised national documents is the introduction of new definitions of 'missing', 'absent' and 'away from placement without authorisation'. Locally a shared understanding is being sought as to how children missing from care should be responded to as it will be important for this to be done consistently in a way which promotes their safeguarding.

7.   An important part of the process is the timely sharing of information between agencies. It is acknowledged by the police that in respect of children under the new category of 'absent', this may be a challenge and a new process is being developed. Information regarding children classified as 'missing' will continue to be shared in the same way.

Current Service Provision

8.   During 2013/14, the process for when a child was reported missing was as follows:

- 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, take a missing child report and lead the effort to find them
- the Children Missing Officer within Children's Social Care is notified of the missing report
- when the child is found the Police complete a 'safe and well' check
- where there is a delay in the child being found there is ongoing dialogue between the Police and Children's Social Care
- a 'found' report is sent to the Children Missing Officer by the Police
- the Children Missing Officer co-ordinates the request for a return interview or a multi-agency meeting from the relevant team
- a worker visits the child to complete a return interview and if required co-ordinate a multi-agency meeting.

9.   A return interview is completed when the young person has gone missing for the second and then subsequent times; or the first time if there are particular vulnerabilities identified or they have been missing for 24 hours

10.   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.

11.   The request for a return interview is either directed to an allocated social worker or to a worker from the NCC Targeted Support Service.

12.   A return interview should be undertaken within 72 hours and is an opportunity to discuss why the child has gone missing and to plan help and support with the goal of preventing, or reducing, future occurrences. When required, a multi-agency meeting will be held.

13.   The revised children missing from home and care protocol will introduce some changes to the above process to reflect the change in definitions and the

subsequent response required. The intention is to continue with a robust and supportive response to all children covered by the protocol.

Key data

14.	Data is collated on a monthly basis and used to inform practice and strategy. A presentation accompanies this report highlighting some of the key findings. There is as yet no national data to enable comparison of practice. A presentation will provide further key data for children going missing from care.

15.	The key findings for 2013/14, including comparison to 2012/13, are as follows:

❖	Excluding other local authority looked after children, the number of recorded episodes of missing children remained stable from 1,280 to 1,282 but the number of individual young people decreased substantially from 720 to 644. This mainly relates to a decrease in the number of young people missing from home.

❖	Regarding Nottinghamshire looked after children going missing from care; there was an increase of 30 individual children and 106 episodes. This may be linked to increased reporting or evidence of more children going missing. The care population is also ageing which may be a factor. Further attention will be given to this over the coming year. The data relating to looked after children suggests that they are more likely to go missing from external providers (i.e. non NCC provision) or when placed out of the County.

❖	87% of children who are reported missing are found in under a day and the median time that children are missing is four hours.

❖	Regarding gender, there was a 51:49 male:female ratio in respect of individual young people which is similar to the previous year.

❖	The ethnicity of children going missing largely reflects the child population within Nottinghamshire.

❖	The peak age range of children going missing is 13-17 years with 70% aged 13-16 years; there has been a slight decrease in children less than 13 years during this year which is positive.

❖	112 multi-agency meetings were held over the previous year.

16.	The reasons young people give for going missing are varied but are mostly about the relationship with their parents or boundary issues although some were school based. For looked after children, reasons were similar in relation to boundary issues but less so school based, parental relationships or abuse and neglect.

Review of key priorities for 2013/14

17.	This section reviews priorities for work during 2013/14 not previously referenced.

Improve quality assurance; particularly evaluating the quality of the return interview process and intervention in terms of the outcome for the child

This was achieved through a NSCB multi-agency audit which was finalised in January 2014. The outcome of the audit confirmed that there was evidence of good and adequate work leading to positive outcomes for children. There was evidence of multi-agency work across the majority of the cases. Whilst mainly positive, there were some areas for development noted which are being progressed including establishing an ongoing method of quality assurance.

Improve our engagement with young people to ensure their voice is heard

This was a key feature of the NSCB audit and is an area which is promoted through the return interview. It is an area which will receive continued focus during the coming year.

Ensure a more sophisticated analysis of the data, looking at 'hot spots' and repeat missing persons as well as understanding any risk or harm the child has experienced

There has been improved scrutiny of, and response to, the data, e.g. where a child's missing episodes have escalated, or where a children's home had an increase in notifications. To formalise this process, a cross-authority multi-agency approach has been implemented through the introduction of a multiple missing and hotspots meeting which began at the end of April 2014.

Monitor the use of disruption techniques by the police i.e. child abduction warning notices

Child abduction warning notices can be an effective means of disrupting the contact between the child and the adult harbouring them. During 2013/14, the police issued 17 child abduction warning notices against people who may pose a risk to children. This was in respect of eight children and an increase from five the previous year.

Strengthen intelligence sharing processes with the police

Intelligence has been shared between the police and Children's Social Care on a case by case. The police are intending to introduce a generic e-mail address to support improved communication.

Further develop work with the looked after children teams including a focus on children placed out of the County.

The introduction of dedicated looked after children teams in 2013 has provided an opportunity to focus on work regarding looked after children who go missing. A specific briefing was held with these teams and there is ongoing communication between them and the children missing officer. There is also connectivity with the Placements Service and other agencies or services linked to looked after children

both in and out of the County. A looked after children team manager also sits on the missing children steering group.

Training

Missing children issues have been raised at eight child sexual exploitation training events; NSCB 'What's New in Safeguarding' events; children's social care managers meetings; training for newly qualified social workers and at a school attendance meeting.

Key priorities for 2014/15

18.   The key priorities are:

- Revise and implement the NSCB protocol to incorporate the new DfE statutory guidance
- Ensure a process for the timely notification of absence notifications
- Review arrangements for the completion of independent return interviews
- Revise electronic reporting processes to reflect the revised protocol
- Plan and deliver appropriate training events including a LAC specific event
- Develop an ongoing audit process
- Police to embed the children missing co-ordinator role and develop a process to strengthen intelligence sharing
- Improve our engagement with young people and ensure their voice is heard through return interviews, planning and outcomes.
- Further develop the inter-agency multiple missing and hot spots meeting
- Improve recording within health services regarding young people who go missing.

Other Options Considered

19.   The report is for noting only.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

20.   The report is for noting only.

Statutory and Policy Implications

21.   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

22.   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 2013-14 and the progress made with regard to the response to those children who go missing from home or care be noted.

Steve Edwards
Service Director, Children's Social Care

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Terri Johnson
Service Manager, Safeguarding (Strategic)
T: 0115 9773921
E: terri.johnson@nottscc.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments

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

Financial Comments (KLA 25/06/14)

24.   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 go missing from home or care: end of year report 2012/13 – report to Children and Young People's Committee on 14 October 2013

Children Who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care – Department for Education Statutory Guidance, January 2014

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.
C0461