

**14 January 2019****Agenda Item: 5****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, COMMISSIONING AND RESOURCES****CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME AND CARE: UPDATE****Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide an overview of the current work being undertaken to tackle issues around children who go missing from home and care and to provide an update against the key priorities identified for 2018-2019, as outlined in the annual report presented to the Committee on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2018.

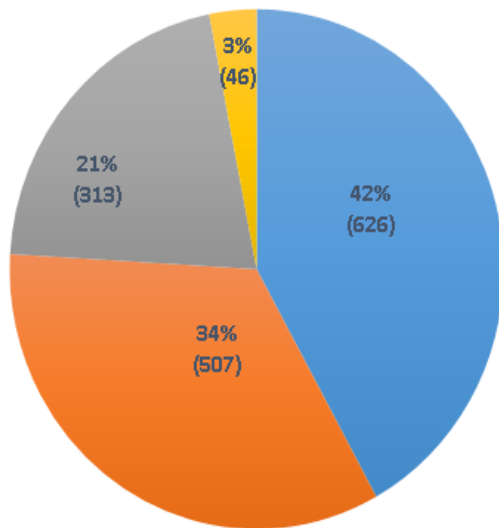
**Information****Strategic Partnerships, Governance and Service Provision**

2. Work concerning Children Missing from Home and Care is overseen by the County Missing Children Steering Group. This group reports into the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board (NSCB). Statistical information for this service area is reported quarterly and annually to the NSCB.

**Children Missing from Home and Care**

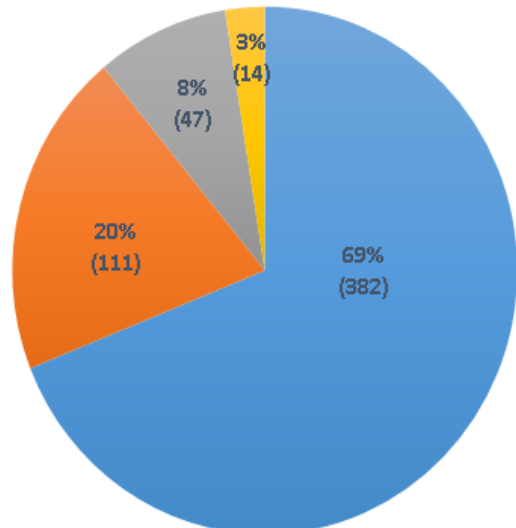
3. There has been a slight increase in notifications for children who have gone missing from home and care between April and September 2018 (against the same period in 2017). Numbers have slowed down however since September 2018 and this shows a similar pattern to previous years where children tend to go missing more in the Spring and Summer months. As can be seen from the charts below, the majority of individual children that these notifications refer to go missing from home. There has been a slight increase in individual children going missing from care, particularly from private residential care homes. So far this financial year there has been an increase in children missing from care who have been placed in Nottinghamshire by other local authorities. Looked after children are more likely to go missing repeatedly whereas children at home are more likely to go missing once. This is reflective of the complex emotional and behavioural issues that children in care are faced with whereas children at home are less likely to have the same vulnerabilities.

**Notifications of missing children**  
April - September 2018 (Total = 1492)



■ Notifications of Children missing from home  
■ Notifications of NCC Children Missing from Care  
■ Notifications of Other Local Authority Children Missing from Care  
■ Notifications of Children Missing from Other

**Individual missing children**  
April - September 2018 (Total = 554)



■ Individual Children missing from home  
■ Individual NCC Children Missing from Care  
■ Individual Other Local Authority Children Missing from Care  
■ Individual Children Missing from Other

4. The Police visit children who go missing upon their return home as soon as possible to discuss the incident. If required, independent return interviews are then completed to provide a narrative as to why children run away and are a tool for preventing future incidents. The national guidance and cross authority procedures are clear in that the worker undertaking the return interview should be independent (i.e. someone not involved in caring for the child) and that it should be completed with the child in a neutral venue where they feel safe. Where required, return interviews are attempted in the majority of cases but interviews are not always completed for a variety of reasons. As previously reported to Committee, 100% completion of required return interviews is very difficult to achieve as older children may refuse to participate or parents may decline the service, particularly where professional services are not already involved. Work to further improve completion rates of return interviews is on-going through training, reminders and advice from children missing officers. The policy, procedures and guidance is also currently under review for Nottinghamshire County Council staff which will reflect the newly published cross-authority procedures. For looked after children these return interviews are particularly important. It should be noted however that additional safeguards are in place for this group, for example, all have a named Independent Reviewing Officer and regular reviews to which they are invited or to contribute to if not wanting to attend. These young people also have allocated social workers who will see them alone on a regular basis.
5. For the majority of children who go missing, this is an isolated occurrence. A small number of children will go missing for a second or third time but the numbers significantly reduce at this stage. For any child who goes missing three times in a 90 day period then a multi-agency meeting is convened to consider the child's circumstances and support needs. The numbers of multi-agency meetings completed has improved since April and it is considered that this is having a positive impact on reducing any subsequent missing incidents.

Performance information regarding return interviews and multi-agency meetings will be provided in the end of year report to Committee.

6. Return interviews continue to identify that the primary causes for children going missing from home and care are due to emotional issues. For children missing from home, this relates primarily to boundary issues and difficult parent and child relationships. For children missing from care, boundary issues are again the main cause for missing episodes but for these children the issues also extend to drugs and alcohol, difficult relationships with family and friends, mental health issues and offending behaviour. These issues have been raised at the County Missing Steering Group and it is recognised that this is a complex issue, particularly for children in care who are more likely to be highly vulnerable with multiple issues that are difficult to address. The monthly multi agency 'Multiple Missing and Hotspots' meeting considers and reviews all children in Nottinghamshire who have been missing five times or more in any one month to ensure all services are working together to reduce the missing episodes.
7. Addressing missing episodes of looked after children placed by other local authorities (OLAs) in Nottinghamshire remains a challenge, particularly for those who go missing repeatedly. A regional protocol has now been agreed regarding the expected response to missing children. Work to promote this within the region is underway. For authorities placing in Nottinghamshire from outside of the region, continued efforts will take place directly with those authorities to encourage compliance with national and Nottinghamshire guidance.
8. As of 5<sup>th</sup> November 2018, Nottinghamshire County Council had 287 looked after children placed out of area. The response to children missing out of area is the same as for those missing within Nottinghamshire. The Council's Children's Social Care Services are responsible for the care planning and risk assessments for those children and this includes responding to missing episodes and completing return interviews. The majority of these children are seen by their own Social Worker but arrangements are also in place with host authorities for some children who have been placed at a lengthy distance.

#### **Update against key priorities for 2018-19**

9. ***Priority to 'Develop early intervention strategies that will reduce the numbers of missing children having multiple missing occurrences'***. The overall strategy to tackle the issue of children missing from home and care is to prevent children from going missing, protect those who do go missing and provide support to children who have gone missing and their families. Given that boundary issues are a primary causal factor for children going missing, the Missing Steering Group has an agreed set of actions for early help services to address these issues when early indicators are present.
10. The children identified as having multiple missing episodes are primarily looked after children with what appears to be a disproportionate number of those placed in residential homes. There was positive engagement from Nottinghamshire County Council residential staff and foster carers with recent training but a review of attendance has identified that there was little engagement from private residential staff or independent foster carers. The Missing Steering Group has therefore agreed an action for a focused piece of work with private care home providers in Nottinghamshire. More children are currently being placed in private residential homes and independent foster homes as opposed to Nottinghamshire County Council foster placements due to there not being enough foster placements

available for children in Nottinghamshire. An initiative to increase the numbers of foster carers is currently being consulted upon with a plan to roll this out in the New Year. As this is one of the possible contributory factors for multiple missing occurrences, it is anticipated that this will have a positive impact upon children going missing repeatedly given that foster placements are more likely to provide a more stable environment for children.

11. ***Priority to 'Increase the quality of Return Interviews by supporting professionals to engage children in the process'.*** Building on the training in April and May 2018, Children Missing Officers have continued to attend team meetings for Children's Social Care teams and the Family Service to reinforce good practice. It remains a priority to increase the numbers of completed return interviews by escalating outstanding work, especially for looked after children. Looked after children are a particularly vulnerable group and listening to them is an important factor in protecting them from the risk of going missing again, from risks they may have been exposed to while missing or from risk factors in their placement.
12. There is a plan to complete audit activity of Return Interviews in the New Year which will focus upon quality of engagement with the child by reviewing how the voice of the child is captured and reviewing the professional's ability to establish an understanding of the child's missing episode.
13. ***Priority to 'Build on existing close multi-agency relationships to further improve information sharing at the earliest opportunity to ensure children are found quickly'.*** Overall, multi-agency working to find children when missing is positive; the Children Missing Officers are in communication with the Police Missing Team on a daily basis upon receiving missing children reports to share information. There are also a number of meetings that take place on a regular basis that has enhanced information sharing and safeguarding arrangements such as the Multiple Missing and Hotspots meeting, Multi-agency sexual exploitation panel (MASE) and Concerns Network meeting. Improved communication between Social Workers and the Police Missing Team would further enhance the search process and work is being done to address this via on-going training within teams and revised procedure and practice guidance.
14. ***Priority to 'Address Missing OLA through developing regional protocols and effective working arrangements with those local authorities who most use Nottinghamshire to place children'.*** A shared protocol has been agreed by senior managers within the East Midlands Region to address these issues. This includes more robust practices around placement notifications, information sharing of children missing risks and escalation processes where procedures are not followed by the placing authority. It is recognised that this will not in itself impact on authorities outside of the region so individual agreements with placing authorities, in line with the East Midlands protocol, will be sought on a case by case basis.

## **Mid-year summary 2018/19**

15. The overall response to children who go missing in Nottinghamshire is dynamic and effective but there are areas for improvement over the next six months. Performance data identifies a stable picture of children going missing from home and care in Nottinghamshire but the completion rate of return interviews needs to improve.

## **Other Options Considered**

16. No other options have been considered

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

17. To agree future arrangements for the Committee to receive performance data and information on this work.

## **Statutory and Policy Implications**

18. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

## **Financial Implications**

19. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

## **RECOMMENDATION/S**

That the Committee:

- 1) agrees to receive quarterly performance data included in the quarterly performance reports to the Committee.
- 2) agrees to receive six-monthly reports to provide an overview of the work to address Children Missing from Home and Care in Nottinghamshire.

**Laurence Jones**

**Service Director, Commissioning and Resources**

**For any enquiries about this report please contact:**

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## **Constitutional Comments (CEH 28/12/18)**

20. The recommendations fall within the remit of the Children and Young People's Committee under their terms of reference.

### **Financial Comments (SAS 02/01/19)**

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

### **Background Papers and Published Documents**

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.

Child Sexual Exploitation and Children Missing from Home and Care: annual report 2017/18 – report to Children and Young People’s Committee on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2018.

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

All.

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