

Item No. 12.	Classification: Open	Date: 25 February 2014	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Statutory Guidance on Children who Run Away or Go Missing from Home or Care	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Director Children's Social Care	

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the committee note the contents of the report.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Statutory Guidance

2. In the latest guidance issued in December, there are now new requirements for children who go missing from home and from care. A new requirement is that local authorities should name a senior children's service manager as responsible for monitoring policies and performance relating to children who go missing from home or care. The responsible manager should look beyond this guidance to understand the risks and issues facing children missing from home or care and to review best practice in dealing with the issue.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

3. In fulfilling their statutory roles, LSCBs should give due consideration to the safeguarding risks and issues associated with children missing from home or care. To do this, they will need to see that partners from children's social care, police, health, education and other services work effectively together to prevent children from going missing and to act when they do go missing. They should ensure that the local Runaway and Missing From Home and Care (RMFHC) protocol is adequate and up to date. They should receive and scrutinise regular reports from the local authority analysing data on children missing from home and from care. As part of this, they should review analysis of return interviews. They should also review regular reports from children's homes used by the local authority or within the local authority area on the effectiveness of their measures to prevent children from going missing.

Runaway and Missing From Home and Care (RMFHC) protocol

4. Local authorities should agree with local police and other partners a protocol for dealing with children who run away or go missing in their area. Where appropriate, they should also have agreed protocols with neighbouring authorities or administrations. The protocols should be agreed and reviewed regularly with all agencies and be scrutinised by the LSCB. Police force operational areas often cover more than a single local authority area. RMFHC

protocols should therefore be agreed by agencies on a regional or sub-regional basis to ensure a consistent approach. The protocol should include details of arrangements to monitor outcomes and analyse patterns including children placed in the area by other local authorities.

Access to support

5. When a child has run away or is missing from home they should be able to easily access support services, such as help lines or emergency accommodation. Support should also be made available to families to help them understand why the child has run away and how they can support them on their return.

Independent return interviews

6. When a child is found, they must be offered an independent return interview. Independent return interviews provide an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children from the risk of going missing again, from risks they may have been exposed to while missing or from risk factors in their home.
7. The interview should be carried out within 72 hours of the child returning to their home or care setting. This should be an in-depth interview and is normally best carried out by an independent person (i.e someone not involved in caring for the child) who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able to follow-up any actions that emerge. Children sometimes need to build up trust with a person before they will discuss in depth the reasons why they ran away.

Collecting, sharing and analysing data on children who go missing

8. Early and effective sharing of information between professionals and local agencies is essential for the identification of patterns of behaviour. Relevant data may include times and duration of missing episodes, information from return interviews, absence data from schools, etc. This may be analysed to identify areas of concern for an individual child, or to identify 'hotspots' of activity in a local area. This will help authorities to identify risks in their area, such as exploitation, gangs or crime related activity that might not be apparent. It will also help identify trends, for example, whether children are going missing from a particular children's home or other patterns across the local authority.
9. Data and analysis of children who go missing both from home and from care should be included in regular reports to council members, especially to the lead member for children's services and in reports by the local authority to the LSCB.
10. When a looked after child is placed in a host authority, the responsible authority should ensure the independent review interview takes place, working closely with the host authority.
11. Data for children missing or away from placement without authorisation should be reported to the Department for Education by the responsible authority through their annual data returns on looked after children.

New Guidance on care leavers being enabled to remain with their foster carer

12. Once legally adult, young people can no longer be children in care and can therefore not be fostered. The new clause to the Children and Families Bill, will give young people in care the opportunity to remain with their former carers into legal adulthood, enabling them to move to greater independence when they are ready, rather than when they reach a pre-determined age limit. Evidence from Staying Put pilots is that young people have better outcomes in terms of education and employment where they are allowed to remain with their foster carer. Additional government funding has been earmarked to support the new guidance.

Policy implications

13. There are no policy implications relating to this report

Community impact statement

14. This item will have an impact on the work that the council does with looked after children.
15. The decision to note this report has been judged to have no or very limited impact on local people and communities.

Resource implications

16. There are no resource implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Rory Patterson, Director Children's Social Care	
Report Author	Rory Patterson, Director Children's Social Care	
Version	Final	
Dated	12 February 2014	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Director of Legal Services	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services	No	No
Cabinet Member	No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	12 February 2014	