

<b>Item No.</b> 6.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 3 November 2014	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Corporate Parenting Committee
<b>Report title:</b>		Children Missing from Care and Distance Placements	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Director, Children's Social Care	

## RECOMMENDATION

1. Members note the information presented in this report on children looked after missing from care in 2013/2014.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The reasons children go missing whilst in care are complex and varied. In 2013 Ofsted reviewed 105 cases where children had gone missing across 10 local authorities. They found that these children had experienced inadequate parenting, past or current abuse, bullying and domestic violence. Some had experienced several placement moves. They found that children who went missing were subjected to considerable associated risk, most often from sexual exploitation, drug and alcohol abuse, and becoming the victim or perpetrator of crime<sup>1</sup>.
3. In Southwark we aim to secure suitable placements for children and young people where they are required to come into care. We aim to achieve placement stability, in terms of the child's emotional stability and physical placement.
4. In 2013/2014 there were 119 recorded occasions when a child went missing from care in Southwark, a total of 38 children. This report provides a data analysis of those 38 children, presenting their common characteristics in provides insights into their cases histories to understand why they went missing from care.

## Department for Education (DfE) definition

5. Where children and young people are recorded as missing from placements for more than 24 hours this is counted by the DfE as a placement change. The way the DfE records missing placements has changed recently and in future there will be separate indicators on children and young people who go missing from their placements and children and young people who move placement.

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<sup>1</sup> Ofsted (Feb, 2013) Missing children <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/surveys-and-good-practice/m/Missing%20children.doc>

## KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

### Missing children

10. In 2013/2014 there were a total of 119 episodes of children looked after reported missing for more than 24 hours. A total of 38 children were accountable for these missing episodes and went missing at any time during 2013/2014.

### Age

11. All the children who went missing were aged 13-18, the majority were aged 16 and 17.

Age	Number of children
18	8
17	13
16	8
15	4
14	3
13	2

\*The data records the age of young people at the date the report was run and therefore shows that 8 children were 18. At the time they went missing all the young people were under 18.

### Gender

12. There is an equal split with 19 males and 19 females who experienced missing episodes.

Male	Female
19	19

### Ethnicity

13. The majority, 40%, of those who had missing episodes were white British.

Ethnicity	Number of children
White British	15
Black African	5
Black Caribbean	5
Black other	3
White mixed Black Caribbean	2
Asian, Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	1
Other	1
Mixed other	1

### Number of missing episodes

14. 1 child had 10 missing episodes. The majority of children went missing between 1-3 times.

Number missing episodes	Number of children
10	1
9	1
8	2
7	2
6	2
5	2
4	2
3	6
2	10
1	12

### Legal status

15. Most children were on Full Care Orders or accommodated under Section 20.

Legal status	Number of children
Interim care order	2
Full Care Order	17
Remanded to care	1
S20	18

### Distance placements

#### Distance

16. At 31 March 2014 of the total Looked After Children (LAC) population of 550 children and young people, 143 (26%) are in placements 20 miles and over away from Southwark.

Distance- miles	Number of Children and Young People (C&YP) placed over 20 miles away
20-50	67
50-100	22
100-200	21
200 and over	12
No applicable*	21

\*not applicable – is those placed with parents, unaccompanied asylum seeking children or missing

## Age

17. The majority of those placed over 20 miles away were aged 13-18.

Age	Number of C&YP placed over 20 miles away	
	Female	Male
0-5	5	7
5-9	9	13
10-15	23	31
16-17	17	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>89</b>

## Gender

18. The majority of those placed over 20 miles away are male.

Female	Male
54	89

## Legal status

19. The majority of children and young people are on Interim Care Orders.

Legal status	Number of C&YP placed over 20 miles away	
	Female	Male
Full Care Orders	6	4
Interim Care Order	37	50
Placement Order	0	3
Remanded to Care	8	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>89</b>

## Types of providers

20. The majority of those in distance placements have been placed for adoption.

Placement type	Number of C&YP placed over 20 miles away		
	Female	Male	Total
Placed for adoption	37	45	82
Residential Care	12	25	37
Children's home	0	9	9
Missing	3	3	6
Placed with parents	1	2	3
Foster Care	1	1	2
Young offender institute	0	2	2

### Children who went missing from out of borough placements in 2013/14

21. 34 children who were placed outside of Southwark went missing on 92 occasions. More children went missing from privately provided out of borough placements than those provided by Southwark (22 compared to 14). Looking at the provider of each placement the children were in prior to going missing shows that although fewer children went missing from own-provision placements, on average they went missing on more occasions.
22. On half of all occasions a child went missing from an out of borough placement in 2013/14 the placement they were in was an own-provision foster placement (not with a relative or friend).

Children who went missing from out of borough placements in 2013/14				
Placement child went missing from	No. of episodes	%	No. of children	Average missing episodes
Own provision (by the Local Authority)	47	51%	14	3.4
Private provision	45	49%	22	2.0
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>2.7</b>

Type and provider of placement child was in prior to going missing – Out of borough				
Previous placement type	Own Provision	Private Provision	Total episodes	No. of children
Homes and hostels	0	6	6	5
Independent living , e.g. in flat, lodgings, bedsit, B&B or with friends, with or without formal support	0	17	17	9
Foster placement with relative or friend	1	0	1	1
Placement with other foster carer*	46	15	61	19
Residential care home	0	7	7	6
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>40</b>

\* There were a number of children who went missing more than once from foster care placements and a small number, 3, who went missing from both our own provision and private provision foster care placements. 10 were in our own provision only and 6 were in private provision only.

### Missing from care – learning from local research

23. The Children's Rights team produced a Missing in Care research report in July 2014 which considered the views of 15 of the 38 who experienced missing

episodes. Interviews were conducted with children who were in a range of placements including foster care, semi-independents, children's homes and young offenders institutes, the reasons they gave for going missing were as follows:

Reason for going Missing	Number of Interviewees
Placement Location	2
Support at Placement (not feeling loved or cared for)	6
Conflict at Placement	1
Wanting family contact	2
To see friends or girlfriend/boyfriend	4

24. The research report concluded that the two primary reasons that young people went missing were placement location and wanting to be loved. Over 50% of the young people interviewed in the research talked about receiving a negative reaction when they returned to their placement and none of the young people said that they had received a return to care interview after they had returned.

### **Policy implications**

25. It is Southwark's policy to place children in or near to the borough so that children and young people can benefit from the high quality services provided locally. It also ensures that they can maintain contact with their families and community.

### **Actions being taken**

26. As noted above achieving permanence and stability for looked after children is complex and involves a number of different professionals. For example: social workers, brokers who buy independent sector places, the in-house foster care service and the virtual school.
27. A LAC Strategic Group has been established which will improve co-ordination between the different parts of the looked after system. This group will co-ordinate the development and delivery of a LAC Strategy which will incorporate the work already undertaken on ensuring Southwark complies with the statutory Sufficiency Duty on ensuring an appropriate supply of good quality placements.
28. Recent stability and distance placements audits have taken place and a number of actions are being taken to address the issues raised including:
- Further work on hearing and acting on the voice of children and young people who are looked after by increasing young people's involvement in the development and on-going monitoring of care plans and pathways plans and providing an independent service for young people who go missing to be interviewed on their return

- St Christophers fellowship have been commissioned to provide a return interview service for all children who go missing from care. This service will be starting from 1/11/14 and will provide independent high quality face to face interviews within 72 hours of the young person being found or returning home. The service will also, where appropriate, provide one to one support for young people and offer mediation and signposting services.
- We will ensure all mechanisms to fully understanding the current and future needs of children and young people are monitored, such as the use of Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires for example.
- Build on existing work, engaging children and young people in provider monitoring and improving contract management to ensure our contracted providers are meeting the needs of children and young people.
- Providing additional training for staff and foster carers on recognising and supporting mental health/therapeutic support needs of children and young people.

29. In addition the LAC Strategic Group is prioritising work on initiatives which will increase services and support to enable more children and young people to remain at home. This includes developing more “edge of care” services with a particular focus on work with adolescents.

### **Community impact statement**

30. Southwark Looked After Children services works to promote the best possible outcomes for children in care. The care population is diverse in terms of age, gender and ethnicity and we closely monitor these protectiveness characteristics to ensure we understand specific needs and are able to deliver services that address these needs. It is recognised that placement stability, engagement in education, access to leisure and healthy lifestyles all help to build resilience for young people to successfully achieve economical wellbeing and make a positive contribution. Effective performance monitoring supports these objectives and enables us to identify areas where improvements may need to be made.

### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

<b>Background Papers</b>	<b>Held At</b>	<b>Contact</b>
Children Missing in Care	Children's and Adults' Services, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH	Elaine Gunn 020 7525 5479 <a href="mailto:elaine.gunn@southwark.gov.uk">elaine.gunn@southwark.gov.uk</a>

### **APPENDICES**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Title</b>
None	

## AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Lead Officer</b>	Rory Patterson, Director, Children's Social Care		
<b>Report Author</b>	Rory Patterson, Director, Children's Social Care		
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<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b>			
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments Included</b>	
Director of Legal Services	No	No	
Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services	No	No	
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	No	No	
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