

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
16 FEBRUARY 2016
MISSING CHILDREN
REPORT OF HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1 Purpose

- 1.1 To consider the work being carried out by Nottingham City Council in supporting children who go missing from care and from home.
- 1.2 To identify any issues that could be built into the work programme for future scrutiny activity.

2 Action required

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to explore what action Nottingham City Council is taking to tackle missing children in Nottingham.

3 Background information

- 3.1 The term 'missing' refers to children and young people who have run away from their home or care placement or have been forced to leave or whose whereabouts is unknown.
- 3.2 Although children from all backgrounds will go missing, there are some groups more likely to runaway than others. For example, nationally, 10,000 children run away from care home or foster placements each year.¹ These children may face an increased risk of significant harm, including the potential of being exposed to the risk of alcohol and drugs, criminal and sexual exploitation.
- 3.3 Approximately 250,000 people go missing every year in the United Kingdom. Estimates suggest that roughly two-thirds of all missing cases relate to children and young people, meaning around 140,000 people under the age of 18 go missing each year.²
- 3.3 The discussion will focus on the following:

The work undertaken in prevention, protection and service provision for missing children.

In Nottingham City there are well established arrangements to respond to missing children. These are based on effective partnership working with key agencies, particularly the Police. This work is undertaken in

¹ The Children's Society, <http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/news-and-blogs/our-blog/why-international-missing-childrens-day-matters>

² Missing People, registered charity. <https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/about-us/about-the-issue/policy-parliamentary-work/69-auto-generate-from-title.html>

accordance with both national and local practice guidance, particularly the Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Board (NCSCB) Missing Children Protocol.

Local arrangements are comprised of a number of connected elements

- Strategic – The NCSCB has a multi-agency Missing Children sub-group. This group ensures that there is effective communication and coordination of local activity. The group also examines local practice in relation to children missing from education.
- Operational – Work with missing children takes place in the context of the wider safeguarding arrangements. Measures which have been previously considered by the Scrutiny Committee make a direct contribution to promoting the safety of vulnerable children who go missing, e.g. the MASE panel receives information about children who are at risk of sexual exploitation who go missing. In addition to the wider arrangements there are specific measures in place for missing children. Every month there is a meeting between Police and Children’s Social Care staff to discuss those children who have been reported missing most frequently in the previous period. It has recently been agreed that a manager from one of the City Council’s residential unit will attend these meetings to ensure the needs of children living in residential settings are given ongoing consideration. Further elements of the response to individual children are set out in the following section.

The systems in place to effectively respond to children who go missing or absent.

The Police share information about all children who are reported missing with the City Council. This information differentiates between those children reported missing and those who are identified as absent. The absent category was introduced in national guidance in 2013 to differentiate between those young people whose whereabouts were not known and those young people who were not where they were supposed to be. The Police also notify the City Council when children who have returned. This information sharing takes place with the City Council Missing Children team, which is a small team that is now line-managed by the Child Sexual Exploitation Coordinator.

When a child has returned their family will either be written to, offering information and guidance, or, where concerns are more serious a return interview will be offered. There is a differentiated response as most young people who are reported missing are absent for very short periods. Some young people however are more vulnerable e.g. go missing on more than one occasion or are identified as being at risk of CSE. It is important therefore that there is a proportionate respon.

The purpose of a return interview is to offer support to the young person and their family and to identify/address safeguarding needs. All return interviews are undertaken by someone independent, i.e. not responsible for the day to day care of the young person.

Where a young person is identified as being particularly vulnerable a meeting will take place to look at how best to support and protect them. This meeting will be chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer and will involve staff from all agencies who work with the child and family.

Developing an increased understanding and awareness of missing children, their parents and carers.

The missing children receives quarterly reports about the number of young people reported as missing and so can identify any local trends or developments. At an individual level return interviews provide an insight into the needs and challenges faced by children, young people and their carers.

Further work is planned to develop a system of analysing the information is return interviews to provide a more qualitative insight into the local profile of children and young people who go missing. This will also provide useful intelligence which will be shared with Police colleagues to further strengthen the response to children who go missing.

Is there a multi-agency response to meeting the needs of children and young people who are missing or absent?

As will be seen from the information above the response to children who go missing in Nottingham is multi-agency in nature, with all key organisations fully engaged in supporting vulnerable children.

4 List of attached information

4.1 None

5 Background papers, other than published works or those disclosing exempt or confidential information

5.1 None.

6 Published documents referred to in compiling this report

6.1 Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board Missing Children Protocol

6.2 Statutory Guidance on Children who Run Away or go Missing from Home or Care (Department for Education June 2013)

7 Wards affected

7.1 Citywide.

8 Contact information

8.1 Rav Kalsi
Senior Governance Officer
rav.kalsi@nottinghamcity.gov.uk
0115 8763759