

<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Schools</b>
<b>To:</b>	<b>Schools, Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>12 October 2016</b>

## **Progress Report on Implementation: Children Missing from Home and Care**

### **Review Information**

Date approved at City Council: 12 January 2016 Member who led the original review: Councillor Barry Bowles Lead Officer for the review: Benita Wishart Date progress last tracked: April 20, 2016
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1. In approving this Review the City Council asked me, as the appropriate Cabinet Member for Children's Services, to report on progress towards these recommendations to this Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
2. Details of progress with the remaining recommendations are shown in Appendix 2.
3. Members are therefore asked to consider progress against the recommendations and give their view as to how progress is categorized for each.
4. Introduction

An overview enquiry was carried out by the committee into children reported as missing from home and care; concluding in January, 2016. While progress in several areas has been made, two recommendations require further explanation in this report to explain progress made. This report updates the Schools, Children, and Families Oversight and Scrutiny Committee on both, while updating progress and challenges overall in the area of missing children from home and care.

### **Outstanding Recommendations**

- 1) The development of an overarching strategy for clarity in responsibilities and risk management, especially for looked after children and persistent runaways. There is a need for information to be shared effectively and appropriate support offered.
- 2) The Runaways Charter has been signed; and needs to be taken forward to enhance our work with vulnerable children and young people

The overarching strategy that guides interagency practice is in place, launched in February, 2016 (see appendix). This strategy was informed by the West Midlands Missing Protocol, and is called Birmingham's **Missing from Home and Care Practice Guidance**. The guidance sets out how children are reported and then recorded as missing, and it guides decision making around the proportionate and appropriate response needed to help. The guidance explains how to classify and then define a child when they are not where they are supposed to be (through the use of two categories - 'absent' and 'missing'), and it contains a range of resources to help practitioners. The guidance explains the process of the return home interview, and clarifies that children's services

contract the Children's Society to offer this service (see commissioning section). The guidance was a shared task by members of the Missing Operational group (MOG), a monthly partnership meeting chaired by the Chief Social Work Officer. When a child is reported as missing police will determine the category of **absent** (not where they are supposed to be but not at risk) or **missing** (not where they are supposed to be and potentially at risk) and they share the missing reports daily with Childrens Services. Many children are located on the same day, within hours, but the information about the missing episode is entered onto the Childrens Services data base (Carefirst) as a contact. This helps with risk analysis should the child be reported as missing again. Police retain the absent data, although this is accessed for multi-agency discussions and strategy meetings because it helps to identify patterns of behaviour and the overall risk analysis.

The number of children reported as missing in the children's electronic recording system (Carefirst) now matches the number of missing children that the foster care service report on. We had a problem of social worker inconstancy when updating the markers on Carefirst. A clear guidance note was issued that explained how to do this. This is an ongoing area of focus, because the consistency in how to record a child as missing and how to remove the marker when they are located is improving but not always accurate. Managers have been briefed and the guidance note is a tool to help improve things. Improving consistency will increase reliability in the data.

The Children's Society Runaways Charter (see appendix) was agreed with and signed on Jan 12, this year. The charters' four commitments (to count, think, act, prevent) are woven into the work of the strategic missing operational group (MOG).

- 1) Counting – the systems to support reporting and responding to missing children are in place, tested and working. A twice weekly automated report detailing the names of children who are missing from home or care on that day is sent out to all managers. The data intelligence manager is a member of MOG. A member of the internal audit team is also a member.
- 2) Thinking – The MOG meets monthly and reviews the six most worrying cases in the city and tries to understand the inter-service problems that need addressing. This is an intelligent systems review useful for adjusting how we work. For example too many children have plans in more than one service; accordingly we need to ensure that the child in need or child protection plan (or care plan) covers the 'missing' issues.
- 3) Acting – We have improved our data sharing, and work is underway to strengthen the decision making made in CASS and MASH, through the use of the 'signs of safety' risk assessment tools that work cohesively with the CSE screening and risk assessments tools.
- 4) Preventing – intelligence about patterns of behaviour informed by return interviews (like where young people are meeting or congregating) is shared at MOG and police can then act on this intelligence. We need to keep improving the planning for missing children and MOG feedback to the CP and CIC leads is helping to drive up improvements in the CIN, CP and CIC planning work.

## 5. Commissioning progress and planning forward

The Children's Society (Streetwise Project) is commissioned to run until March 2018. Streetwise receive referrals from the West Midlands Police Compact system and via referrals. All notifications / referrals are triaged and rated dependent on level of risk identified. All young people, parents / carers referred receive a letter from Streetwise offering advice and support, along with a "What to do if you runaway" leaflet. Red referrals show levels of risk requiring a return interview or that the young person is in need of immediate intervention in an attempt to prevent further missing episodes. Red risk indicators include (but are not exclusive to) - more than 2 missing episodes, age, CSE, gang affiliation, substance misuse, mental health needs, peer association, troubled family situation, physical and/or learning disability, and or domestic violence. The return interview (usually approximately 1 hour long) allows the young person the opportunity to discuss the missing episode, independently; with an aim of identifying the factors influencing the missing episode (push / pull factors). This information is shared with professionals (including social workers, care homes, police locate teams, education) via a "Professional feedback form". Any relevant intelligence is additionally passed on to the police via the WMP FIB form and shared at the Birmingham MOG, and where appropriate COG and MASE meetings.

Children's Society submit quarterly reports evidencing the number of referrals, the number of interviews conducted and the issues identified as well as information regarding safeguarding concerns, partnership working, case studies and service user feedback and challenges faced. The contract manager (Commissioning) meets with the Children's Society quarterly to discuss the service, barriers to good practice and to develop areas for improvement. The most recent improvement is Children's Society now send in a monthly report of all referrals. This is being used to check that Social Workers have received the reports and uploaded the information onto E-records in CareFirst. As a result of information requested during the Ofsted inspection further improvements have been identified for reporting including when Children's Society first make contact with a young person and numbers of interviews completed within 72 hours.

An opportunity exists to restructure this commission along with services to support young people who are vulnerable to, or victims of, child sexual exploitation and/or child sexual abuse to create an integrated service model which will achieve outcomes for children and families and work to embed ambition for families including stability and resilience. It is proposed that the service operates at two levels as detailed below to reflect the Right Services Right Time framework.

- Early help for children, young people and families who are starting to struggle as a consequence of risk factors (Adverse Childhood Experiences)
- Targeted therapeutic support for children and families affected by exploitation.

It is proposed that the new commissioned service operates from April 2018. The service will operate at the additional needs level and will be developed to create a system approach taking account of both the universal service offer and the services provided by BCC Children's Social Care and Family Support services. The new service model will be designed with reference to other commissioning activity to ensure synergy with services like Forward Thinking Birmingham. Work is also taking place regionally to look at commissioning arrangements for return interviews between authorities and to develop cross boundary solutions.

## 6. Summary

We have a mature system of data sharing, data recording, data reporting and practice guidance that helps us to act intelligently around the risks of being missing from home and care. To support data quality, a relentless approach to data consistency and Carefirst efficacy continues. Return home interviews are being offered, and in many cases taken up. We have improved how and where we store these. Development work continues to help social workers maximise inter-service intelligence so that plans made with children and their families are focussed and helping to address the times when they may be missing.

Tony Stanley  
Chief Social Work Officer  
Char MOG

## Appendices

<b>1</b>	<b>Scrutiny Office guidance on the tracking process</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Recommendations you are tracking today</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Recommendations tracked previously and concluded</b>

## For more information about this report, please contact

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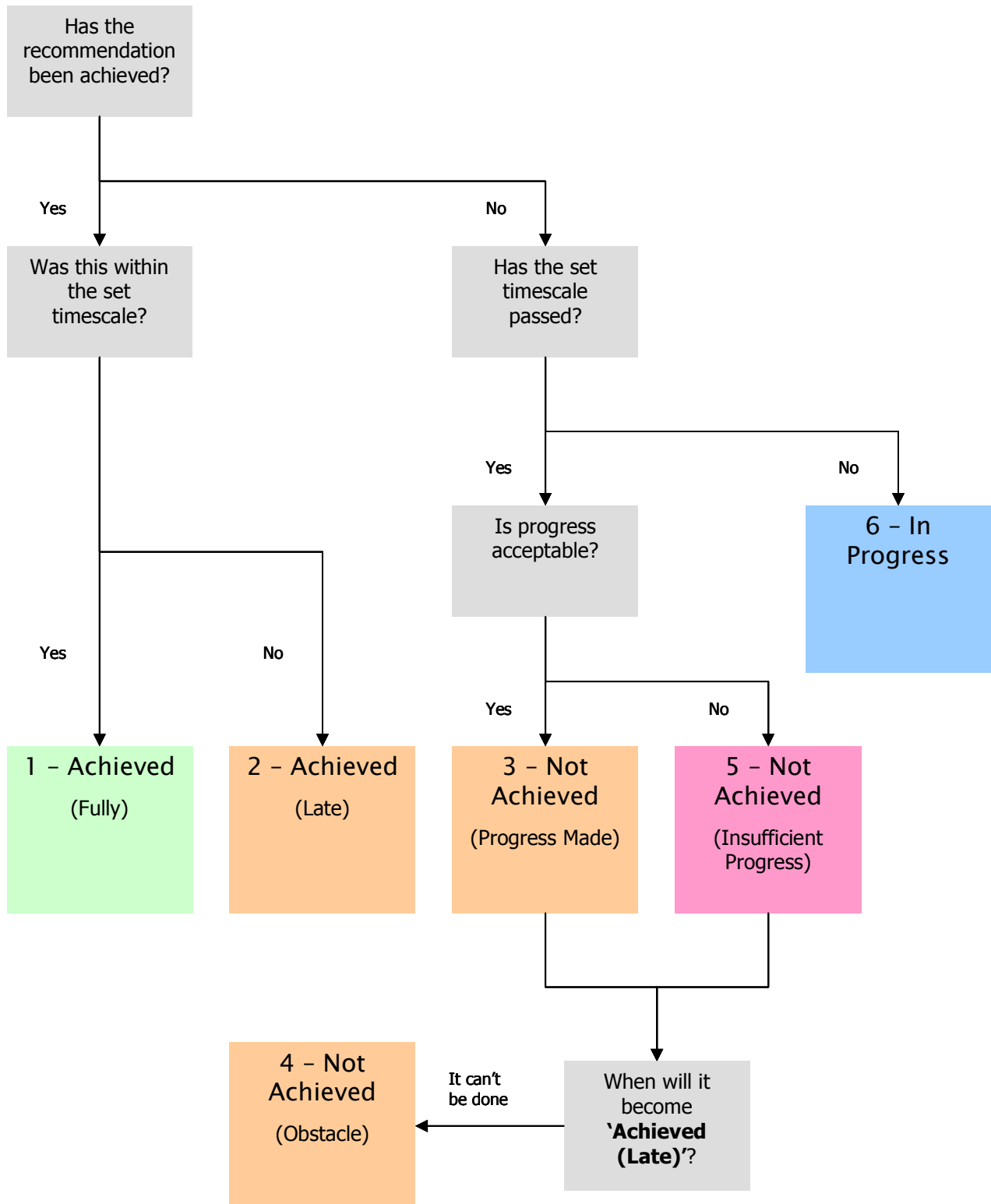
## Appendix 1: The Tracking Process

In making its assessment, the Committee may wish to consider:

- What progress/ key actions have been made against each recommendation?
- Are these actions pertinent to the measures required in the recommendation?
- Have the actions been undertaken within the time scale allocated?
- Are there any matters in the recommendation where progress is outstanding?
- Is the Committee satisfied that sufficient progress has been made and that the recommendation has been achieved?

Category	Criteria
<b>1: Achieved (Fully)</b>	The evidence provided shows that the recommendation has been fully implemented within the timescale specified.
<b>2: Achieved (Late)</b>	The evidence provided shows that the recommendation has been fully implemented but not within the timescale specified.
<b>3: Not Achieved (Progress Made)</b>	The evidence provided shows that the recommendation has not been fully achieved, but there has been significant progress made towards full achievement. <b>An anticipated date by which the recommendation is expected to become achieved must be advised.</b>
<b>4: Not Achieved (Obstacle)</b>	The evidence provided shows that the recommendation has not been fully achieved, but all possible action has been taken. Outstanding actions are prevented by obstacles beyond the control of the Council (such as passage of enabling legislation).
<b>5: Not Achieved (Insufficient Progress)</b>	The evidence provided shows that the recommendation has not been fully achieved and there has been insufficient progress made towards full achievement. <b>An anticipated date by which the recommendation is expected to become achieved must be advised.</b>
<b>6: In Progress</b>	It is not appropriate to monitor achievement of the recommendation at this time because the timescale specified has not yet expired.

## The Tracking Process



## Appendix ②: Progress with Recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Responsibility	Original Date For Completion	Cabinet Member's Assessment
1	The development of an overarching strategy for clarity in responsibilities and risk management, especially for looked after children and persistent runaways. There is a need for information to be shared effectively and appropriate support offered.	Tony Stanley	Overarching Strategy February 2016. Effective information sharing still in progress.	<b>Achieved (in part)</b>
2	The Runaways Charter has been signed; and needs to be taken forward to enhance our work with vulnerable children and young people	Andy Pepper	April 2016	<b>Achieved (Fully)</b>
Evidence of Progress (and Anticipated Completion Date if 'Not Achieved')				

Item	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
Item 1	Work on developing the new 'Vulnerable Children' be notified to January 2016 City Council.	Children's Protection Committee Secretary	January 2016
Item 2	Develop an overarching strategy for looking after children and young people who are clear and understood, with the necessary staff, resources and support. Information is shared effectively and appropriate support is in place for children and young people.	Children's Protection Committee Secretary Chief, Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board	Feedback to Education and Vulnerable Children Unit Committee * 28 April 2016 * Discussion and agreement
Item 3	Progress made in the development of the new 'Vulnerable Children' be notified to January 2016 City Council.	Children's Protection Committee Secretary Chief, Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board	April 2016

Appendix ③: Concluded Recommendations

These recommendations have been tracked previously and concluded. They are presented here for information only.

**concluded**

No.	Recommendation	Responsibility	Date Concluded by Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Tracking Assessment