

Report to: Education and Vulnerable Children Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 20 April 2016

Title: Update on Missing Children from Home or Care

1. Purpose of the Report

To brief the Committee on progress made following the Scrutiny Committee review into children reported as missing from home and care (Children Missing from Home and Care Jan, 2016). Two recommendations were made in the final report, and this update addresses both. While largely on track, and good progress made, there are some systems issues that need resolving to ensure we have a rigorous system of tracking and responding to children reported as missing.

2. Recommendation

That Members note the information contained in this report

3. Contact Officer Details

Tony Stanley
Chief Social Work Officer

Tel: 0121 675 5762

Email: tony.stanley@birmingham.gov.uk

4. Background

4.1 An overview enquiry was carried out by the Committee into children reported as missing from home and care; concluding in January, 2016. Two recommendations were tabled:

- 1) An overarching strategy is needed 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) Progress to be reported back April 2016.

4.2 This report updates the Education and Vulnerable Children Overview & Scrutiny Committee on progress to date, and outlines two areas still to be finalised. An overarching strategy is now in place, informed by the West Midlands Missing Protocol, and called **Birmingham's Missing from Home and Care Practice Guidance**. The guidance details how we are recording children reported as missing, and the response needed to offer help. It contains a range of resources to aid practitioners, and outlines the practice of return interview that the Children Society carries out for the city. The guidance was a shared task by the Missing Operational group (MOG), a monthly partnership meeting chaired by the Chief Social Work Officer.

4.3 The Missing Operational Group (MOG) has operated since autumn 2015, tasked with developing the local practice and operational guidance for the Birmingham partnership while ensuring that the systems of reporting and responding to missing children and young people are in place and rigorous. Partner agencies are represented as members, including children's social care, police, probation, third sector and education. There has been clear progress. The issue of missing children is high on the agenda across the partnership. However, developing the systems of data entry and reporting, and the practice guidance have taken longer than planned. The information sharing about particular children is occurring in the formal child in need and child protection processes, with the need to resume the intelligence aspects of information sharing to determine patterns of behaviours and risk areas for the city. The chief social worker will chair a panel in April where the city's most worrying missing young people will be discussed.

4.4 Key Issues Still to be Addressed

- 1) The police data delivered electronically to Children Social Care are not vetted in terms of risk analysis, so this needs to be carried out by social workers inside the MASH. We are working on a consistent data entry system, and risk analysis to improve accuracy.

- 2) The number of children reported as missing in the children's electronic recording system (Carefirst) does not match the number of missing children that the foster care service report. This is being reviewed by foster care managers and data managers. An ongoing issue is variability in the way the electronic recorded system is used, so improving consistency will increase reliability in data. Ongoing training is in place to help resolve this.

5. Conclusions

I propose to return to Committee in 6 months with another progress update. A clear aim is to have the outstanding issues managed.