



Haringey Council

Agenda item:

[No.1]

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

On 12 December 2011

Report Title: Scrutiny Review – Missing from Care and from Home	
Report of: Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
Contact Officer : Robert Mack, Principal Scrutiny Support Officer Tel: 0208 489 2921	
Wards(s) affected: All	Report for: N/A
<b>1. Purpose of the report (That is, the decision required)</b>	
1.1 To approve the draft scope, terms of reference and work plan for the scrutiny review on children missing from care and from home.	
<b>2. Introduction by Cabinet Member (if necessary)</b>	
2.1 N/A	
<b>3. State link(s) with Council Plan Priorities and actions and/or other Strategies:</b>	
3.1 Council Plan: Thriving and safer	
<b>4. Recommendations</b>	
4.1 That the scope, terms of reference and work plan for the review be approved.	
<b>5. Reason for recommendation(s)</b>	

5.1	Included within the body of the report.
6.	<b>Other options considered</b>
6.1	Included within the body of the report.
7.	<b>Summary</b>
7.1	The Committee has commissioned a review into children who go missing from the care or from home. This report provides a background to the issue and proposals for the scope and terms of reference.
8.	<b>Chief Financial Officer Comments</b>
8.1	The production cost of protocols and procedures in respect of missing children is provided for within the relevant service budget. Any reduction in the number of missing children will lead to improved value for money in terms of staff time spent in administration and in supporting the child. There will also be improved value for money for the looked after children's placement budget as there will be less payment for empty bed spaces.
9.	<b>Head of Legal Services Comments</b>
9.1	The "Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care" was issued in July 2009 under Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 which means that except in exceptional circumstances the local authority must act in accordance with it.
9.2	The guidance serves to safeguard <b>all</b> runaways and to redress the imbalance that currently exists between services offered to runaways from the looked after children population and those who run away from home.
9.3	The Children's Society report <i>Stepping Up</i> found that half of local authorities surveyed had no protocol for managing cases of children missing from home however nearly 93 per cent had protocols for children missing from care.
9.4	This statutory guidance is supplementary to <i>Working Together to Safeguard Children</i> and should be read in conjunction with that statutory guidance because a swift and effective response for when a young person runs away is seen by the government as a key element not just in safeguarding young people but also in the link with work to raise their aspirations and improve their life chances.
10.	<b>Head of Procurement Comments – [Required for Procurement Committee]</b>
10.1	N/A

## 11. Equalities & Community Cohesion Comments

11.1 Work undertaken by Barnardo's has suggested that young people who are gay, lesbian and bisexual may be at greater risk from running away from home or from care.

## 12. Consultation

12.1 Consultation will be an integral part of the review. The views of a wide range of stakeholders will be actively sought. Due to the nature of the young people involved, consulting directly with service users is unlikely to be feasible. However, their views could be fed in indirectly through interviewing people who have direct day to day contact with relevant young people and may therefore be in a position to provide feedback.

## 13. Service Financial Comments

13.1 The cost of undertaking the scrutiny review is provided for in the budget for overview and scrutiny. In addition, value for money issues and any potential financial implications arising from the review will be considered in liaison with the service finance lead.

## 14. Use of appendices/tables and photographs

14.1 None

## 15. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

15.1 Background papers are as follows:

## 16. Report

### *Introduction*

16.1 The Committee has commissioned a report into children missing from care and from home. This report provides some background to the issues and suggests some areas that the review may wish to focus upon.

### *Background*

16.2 The Scrutiny Review of Corporate Parenting recommended that a review be commissioned by the Overview and Scrutiny on this issue in response to concerns

that were raised in the course of the review. This was agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 29 June.

- 16.3 The terms 'young runaway' and 'missing' refer to children and young people up to the age of 18 "who have run away from their home or care placement, have been forced to leave or whose whereabouts is unknown".<sup>1</sup>
- 16.4 There is an important distinction between this and unauthorised absence, which is where the whereabouts of looked-after children are known or thought to be known but unconfirmed. In such circumstances, they are not considered to be missing but may instead be classified as absent without authorisation from their placement.
- 16.5 The only authoritative studies to determine the numbers of children who run away have been undertaken by the Children's Society. The most recent of these was published in 2005 and found that over 100,000 children ran away every year. A follow up study is currently being undertaken.
- 16.6 The Children's Society have established the following four key facts about children who run away:
1. Many children run away repeatedly. Just under a third of children who run away do it at least three times. 10% run away up to nine times. 5% run away ten time or more times.
  2. A significant proportion run way for long periods. 25% run away for between two to six nights and 20% for more than a week. 10% will be away for more than four weeks.
  3. Children are often forced to run away. 25% of children said that they ran away because they were told to or were physically forced to go.
  4. The vast majority are not reported as missing. Two thirds of children who run away from home are never reported to the Police as missing.
- 16.7 Some children are more likely to run away than others. Girls are more likely to run away than boys and most are between the ages of 13 and 15. However, a quarter of those who run away do so before the age of 13 and 10% before the age of 10.
- 16.8 Some specific groups of children are more likely to run away than others:
- Children in care. They are three times more likely to run away but only make up 2% of the total number of runaways.
  - Children facing difficulties at school
  - Children who use drugs and alcohol or are in trouble with the Police.
  - Children who consider themselves are disabled or having difficulties with learning
  - Children whose parent's relationship has broken down.
- 16.9 Children who run away can place themselves at considerable risk. In particular, there is danger form physical or sexual abuse and exploitation. For example, Barnardos services that work with sexually exploited young people have reported that more than half of those they support run away on a regular basis. Research from the Children's Society shows that 25% of those who run away each year will

---

<sup>1</sup> *Statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care; DCSF July 2009*

be at risk of serious harm. One in six interviewed said that they had slept rough, one in eight said that they had resorted to begging or stealing and one in twelve reported being actually hurt or harmed.

16.10 The Children's Society<sup>2</sup> have identified four recent trends that they consider to be significant:

- An increase in younger children coming to the attention of their projects.
- An increase in the number of boys
- An increased risk of sexual exploitation
- The use of technology to target vulnerable children.

16.11 They estimate that the overall cost of dealing with runaways is up to £82 million per year. Their view is that early intervention has the potential to result in net savings that range from £200 from less severe cases to up to £300,000 in more severe cases. The costs referred to arise from:

- Missing persons reports which are estimated to cost the Police £1,145 per incident, equating to a total cost of up to £47 million per year.
- The costs of children and young people stealing to survive
- Help from professional agencies. Two hours of support from a qualified children's social worker costs £144.

16.12 Support to a young person after they have run away for the first time is calculated to cost around £800. However, the Children's Society is of the view that if this can prevent two further incidents, it will save around £1,000 to the Police and other public services.

16.13 There is a detailed framework for how agencies should work together to respond to children who run away from care or from home. In 2008, the government published the Young Runaways Action Plan. Following this, statutory guidance for local authorities was issued in 2009, together with a national target (national indicator 71) requiring local areas to report on measures that they have in place to protect and support runaways. New guidance for the Police was also published that set out how incidents should be managed, recorded and investigated.

16.14 The new guidance put greater emphasis on the importance of young runaways being offered a return interview and stressed the importance of information sharing and using common assessment. It also explained the need for a named person to have responsibility at local level.

16.15 Three summary versions of the statutory guidance were also developed. These were for lead members of children's services, directors of children's services and care workers and foster carers. These explained their specific responsibilities to support these vulnerable young people.

16.16 The pieces of guidance cover what should happen when a child runs away and the protocols and procedures that should be in place and followed. These include the following:

- Local Safeguarding Children's Boards are required to define clearly in protocols the roles and responsibilities of different agencies in order to ensure a co-

---

<sup>2</sup> Make Runaways Safe launch report, the Children's Society; July 2011

ordinated response. Procedures must be formally agreed by the Lead Member for children's services and the Council committee responsible for corporate parenting. There should be a named person in the local authority responsible for children and young people who go missing or run away and details of preventative measures.

- Procedures should be in place for the recording and sharing of information between the police, children's services and the voluntary sector. Information should be used to analyse patterns.
- The need for the Police to conduct a "safe and well" check when a child returns from running away to determine their well being and whether they have been a victim of crime or abuse.
- A return interview to be carried out, if possible, by an independent person. This is to establish why the child ran away and what additional support might be required.
- All local authorities should have access to emergency accommodation. This should not be a police cell unless the young person is under arrest.
- Where a young person persistently goes missing, a multi agency risk management meeting should be organised.

16.17 The emphasis within the guidance is on the need for effective multi agency support to children and young people. Running away should be seen as an indicator of underlying problems rather than an isolated event.

16.18 The Children's Society have expressed concern that the changes outlined in the statutory guidance may not have led to the level of improvement intended and have highlighted a number of issues:

- A lack of consistency in the implementation of the statutory guidance
- A raising of thresholds for access to children's services
- National indicator 71 was introduced in 2009 and required local authorities to self assess how much progress they were making to protect and support runaways. It was scrapped last year by the government and it is now discretionary. The indicator was felt by many to assist in promoting action and improvement.
- A shortage of emergency provision. Only half of local authorities surveyed had access to emergency accommodation.
- Lack of awareness of the issue amongst some professionals working with children and parents.
- Cuts to specialist services. A number of services that provide specialised support for children who run away have suffered cuts to their budgets. Specialist services are felt to be best placed to meet the needs of some children who may be vulnerable and/or hard to reach.

16.19 There is a pan London procedure for safeguarding children missing from care and home that Haringey currently follows. This superseded the local joint protocol and practice guidance. However, it is intended to update the Haringey procedures and ensure that they expand upon the pan London ones and highlight responsibilities in risk assessing the difference between "missing" and "unauthorised absence".

16.20 The missing children that professionals deal with in Haringey fall into three categories:

1. Children missing from the Council's care. This covers children and young people who are fostered as well as those who are placed in residential homes within the borough.
2. Children missing from the care of other local authorities who have been placed in Haringey. In particular, there are a number of children's residential homes in the borough that take children from other local authorities. In such cases, Haringey's protocols and procedures apply.
3. Children missing from home.

16.21 The Corporate Parenting Action Plan includes provision to enable children and young people who go missing to be given the opportunity to meet with a designated independent person on their return. Action to implement this is currently being taken. A weekly spreadsheet is now in operation regarding tracking missing young people but the interview process needs to be finalised.

### *Performance*

16.22 National indicator 71 was based on self evaluation. Each local authority was required to provide a score in a range from 0 to 3 (low – high) based on the following five criteria:

- Local information about running away is gathered
- Local needs analysis is in place
- Local procedures to meet the needs of runaways agreed
- Protocols for responding to urgent/out of hours referrals from police or other agencies are in place
- Local procedures include effective needs assessment protocols to support effective prevention/intervention work.

16.23 Haringey scored itself as achieving a score of 2 out of 3 for each these categories – a total score of 10 - in the period from October to December 2009, which is the last period for which statistics have been published. This is around the average for London.

### *Scope of Scrutiny Review*

16.24 It is proposed that the focuses on each of the three specific categories of children and young people referred to above i.e.

- Children missing from the Council's care
- Children missing from the care of other local authorities who have been placed in Haringey
- Children missing from home.

16.25 There are differences in practices and procedures for dealing with the different categories that reflect their different circumstances.

### *Terms of Reference:*

16.26 "To consider how the Council and its partners respond to instances where children or young people run away from home and from the Council's care and, in particular, its policies, procedures, practices and performance"

*Sources of Evidence:*

16.27 Suggested sources of evidence for the review are as follows:

- Research documentation, national guidance and targets
- Statistical evidence including relevant performance data and benchmarking
- Comparison with other areas such as statistical neighbours
- Interviews with a range of stakeholders

*Key Stakeholders:*

16.28 These are as follows:

*Council Services:*

C&YPS

First Response Team

*Partners:*

Police Missing Persons Unit

*The Cabinet*

Councillor Lorna Reith – Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

*Other Groups/Organisations:*

Barnardos – Runaways project/advocacy

Residential care providers

Foster carers

British Refugee Council

Private fostering agencies

Independent advocates

*Consultation/Service User Involvement*

16.29 Due to the nature of the young people involved, consulting directly with them is unlikely to be feasible. However, their views could be fed in indirectly through interviewing people who have direct day to day contact with them and may therefore be in a position to provide feedback. Barnardos undertake independent interviews with children who have returned after running away and could be in position to provide a view on their behalf.

*Membership of Panel:*

16.30 Membership of the Panel is as follows:

- Councillors: Alexander (Chair), Amin and Ejiofor

*Co-opted Members*

16.31 The Panel may, if it feels fit, consider co-opting specific individuals to assist it in its work. Whilst there are no specific criteria regarding their appointment, those best placed to provide assistance would generally be local people with particular

knowledge or experience of the service. Any co-option would be on a non voting basis.

16.32 As the review is likely to cover issues relating to the education of children and young people, the membership of the Panel will be required to include the statutory education co-optees that have been appointed to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. These are:

- Yvonne Denny (church) and Sandra Young (parent governor).

#### *Independent Expert Advice*

16.33 In addition, the Panel may wish to consider if their work would be assisted by the provision of some independent expert advice. This could “add value” to the review by:

- Impartially evaluating current practice providing advice on successful approaches and strategies that are being employed elsewhere
- Suggesting possible lines of inquiry
- Commenting on the final report and, in particular, the feasibility of draft recommendations.

16.34 There is modest budgetary provision for this if required.

#### *Timescale*

16.35 It is proposed that the Review Panel aims to finish its work by the end of the municipal year.

#### *Evidence Sessions*

16.36 As follows:

##### Meeting 1:

*Date:* 18 October

##### *Aims/Objectives:*

1. To provide an overview of the issue and how it is addressed within Haringey
2. To finalise the scope and terms of reference

##### *Background Information:*

- Draft scope and terms of reference

##### *Witness:*

Debbie Haith, Deputy Director C&YPS

##### Meeting 2:

*Date:* 29 November

*Aims/Objectives:*

- To obtain evidence on the number of children that go missing in Haringey and how the Police work with other agencies to address the issue.
- To gain an understanding of potential risks, how they are assessed and the sort of interventions that may be effective.

*Background Information:*

- Relevant statistical information on missing children including aggregated annual figures.

*Witnesses:*

Police Missing Persons Unit  
First Response Team

Meeting 3:

*Date:* 13 December

*Aim/Objective:*

To obtain an understanding of the reasons why children and young people might run away and how well statutory agencies address the issue

*Possible Witnesses:*

Barnardos  
Foster carers  
Independent advocates  
British Refugee Council

Meeting 4:

*Date:* 24 January

*Aims/Objectives:*

To receive evidence on how residential care providers and private fostering agencies address the issue.

*Background Information:*

*Possible Witnesses:*

Residential care providers, including Council run homes  
Private fostering agencies.

Meeting 5:

*Date:* TBA

*Aims/Objectives:*

- To consider further any issues that may have arisen in the course of evidence gathering sessions
- To consider appropriate conclusions and recommendations for the review

*Background Information:*

A digest of evidence received and key issues raised in the course of the review

*Possible Witnesses:*  
C&YPS