

# **MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW - CHILDREN MISSING FROM CARE AND FROM HOME**

**TUESDAY, 24 JANUARY 2012**

Councillors: Alexander (Chair), Amin and Ejiofor

Co-opted Members: Ms. Y. Denny (Church representative) and Ms. S. Young (parent governor)

## **LC15. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None.

## **LC16. URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

## **LC17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

## **LC18. MINUTES**

### **AGREED:**

That the minutes of the meetings of 18 October and 29 November 2011 be approved.

## **LC19. CHILDREN MISSING FROM CARE AND FROM HOME**

The Panel received evidence from a foster carer in Haringey. She stated that she felt that young people often went missing due to peer pressure to stay out late at night. Some young people could come back later than had been agreed and did not contact their carers. In such circumstances, they would often switch off their mobile phones so they could not be contacted by their carer. She had known young people in her care to return home staggering due to the effects of drink or drugs. The social environment encouraged young people to behave in this way.

Foster carers did not always know that the young people that were allocated to them were frequent absconders. Social workers could be involved in addressing issues. Sanctions could often be ineffective. Some young people did not listen to parental figures, which was the reason why they were in care. It could be difficult to get them to attend appointments such as ones with the Youth Offending Service.

Even if foster carers were trained and prepared for dealing with a range of challenges, this did not necessarily mean that they were able to control the young person. She had cared for a 13 year old who had come back at 4:00 a.m. Due to the lateness of the hour, she had considered him to be missing rather than merely late.

Young people in care received £10 per week plus an allowance for clothing. Many of the young people that were in care had already gone off the rails and it was hard to deal with them. Some could demand money and she was aware of one foster carer who was frightened that the young person in her care might harm her if she did not

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give him money. There could also be concern that young people would shoplift if refused money. Others could refuse to attend school. Foster carers were made aware of any issues during looked after children (LAC) meetings. There was reference within training for carers on what they should do if a child went missing.

Panel Members felt that it was important that foster carers were made aware of all relevant information prior to placements. It was noted that a risk assessment as well as a placement plan was drafted for young people being placed. The risk assessment would refer to previous instances of absconding. These documents were shared with the foster carer. Measures were being undertaken currently to improve their quality.

The foster carer stated that social workers spoke to young people to explain the risks of running away. She did not see what else could be done to prevent children going missing. Foster carers also spoke to the young people themselves. They received support including training, part of which was on addressing challenging behaviour. Physical restraint could not be used to prevent young people absconding. Things had changed in recent years and being a foster carer was now more challenging.

It was noted that some young people were in care as they could not be managed effectively by their parents. Concerns about children and young people could be raised by schools and there were mechanisms for addressing these such as turnaround teams. The Council's Virtual Head Teacher who worked with looked after children liaised with schools in such situations.

Wendy Tomlinson from the Children and Young People's Service (C&YPS) reported that placement plans required further improvement. Relevant agencies were informed of placements and involved in developing placements plans. Schools were invited to all meetings but did not always have the time to attend. However, the Virtual Head Teacher was involved and included in LAC reviews.

LAC review meetings included children but placement planning meetings for them did not. These would consider any issues relating to whether children or young people were prone to absconding. Placement planning meetings considered how the young person would function in their placement rather than where they would be placed. Consideration was given to the sort of placements that might be appropriate for the child or young person prior to them being taken into care.

The Panel thanked the foster carer and Ms Tomlinson for their contribution and attendance.

## **AGREED:**

That C&YPS be requested to provide a step by step outline on how the process for placing children and young people operated and confirmation of how much pocket money was allocated to each young person.

## **LC20. FUTURE MEETINGS/PROGRESS OF REVIEW**

It was noted that there was statutory guidance on what should occur when a child returned after going missing. This included a "safe and well" meeting with the Police to ensure that they had not come to any harm and a further interview, which could be

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with an independent advocate, to provide them with opportunity for them to articulate any concerns that they may have that might have contributed to them going missing. This role was currently being undertaken by Barnardos within Haringey. It was noted that Barnardos were scheduled to come to a future meeting of the Panel and would be able to provide information on what they had found since beginning their work in the borough last autumn. The Panel requested information on how this role was undertaken within Haringey prior to Barnardos beginning their work. The Panel also felt that it would be helpful for them to receive case studies from Barnardos when they attend on particular Haringey children and young people who had gone missing. In addition, they requested to be provided with relevant research that had been undertaken on this issue by the Children's Society.

## **AGREED:**

1. That C&YPS be requested to provide separate and comparative statistics on the numbers of children that go missing from residential care and foster placements and an analysis of any patterns that may exist.
2. That information be provided to the Panel on how the role currently undertaken in Haringey by Barnardos was performed prior to their project beginning its work in autumn 2011 as well as relevant research on missing children from the Children's Society.

## **LC21. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

**Cllr Karen Alexander**  
**Chair**