Scrutiny Review – Children Missing from Care and from Home

A REVIEW BY THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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Chair's Foreword:

Missing children constitute a serious concern. They can place themselves at risk of coming to harm or getting into trouble. At the very least, they are a source of anxiety for those who care for them, whether these be parents or guardians, foster carers or residential care staff. In such circumstances, it is essential that services work together well to protect such children and young people, locate them quickly and minimise the risk of them going missing again. Our review has looked at how this is undertaken within Haringey with the aim of identifying any gaps in service and making recommendations on how improvements can be made.

Of particular significance is the fact that there is evidence nationally of under reporting, which the Children's Society has highlighted, with up to two thirds of incidents never reported. As well as having a role in making improvements, it is therefore hoped that this report will at play a part of putting the issue of the agenda locally and raising overall awareness.

Councillor Karen Alexander
Chair of the Review Panel

SCRUTINY REVIEW – CHILDREN MISSING FROM CARE AND FROM HOME

Executive Summary

The Panel were pleased to note that progress has been achieved in recent years in supporting children who go missing from care and from home following the publication by the government of the Young Runaways Action Plan in 2008 and the issuing of statutory guidance. However, the scrapping of national indicator 71, could be a retrograde step if local authorities cease to monitor progress and focus attention away from this issue.

Much useful work has been undertaken locally to focus attention on cases where risk is likely to be the greatest, particularly through work with residential care providers. This has involved ensuring that cases are correctly designated as either "missing" or "unauthorised absence". The distinction is important as a higher level of priority is generally given to instances where children and young people are classified as missing. However, it is still needs to be recognised that risk may also occur in cases of "unauthorised absence" and, as a part of this, the Panel feels that consideration should be given to putting a finite time limit on how long a child or young person can be regarded as such.

High quality statistics and data on missing children are important as they enable patterns and emerging issues to be identified. A range of these are used by the Council and its partners but some are still generated manually. There are some limitations to how much can be done locally to make improvements as the Police Missing Persons database is used across the Metropolitan Police Service as a whole. The Panel nevertheless feels that there is scope for improvement in how statistics and data are shared, collated and analysed, with better and more co-ordinated use of IT.

Foster carers do an invaluable job in looking after children in care. This can be a challenging role in some cases and dealing with children or young people who run away can be very stressful for them. In recognition of this, the Panel is of the view that better support for foster carers should be developed including provision to inform and reassurance them on follow up action by social workers and other relevant professionals after incidents have taken place. This particularly applies to out of hours periods, which is when most incidents occur.

Although the figures for Haringey reflect the fact that looked after children are more likely to go missing, there is clear evidence that there is likely to be *under* reporting of children missing from home. The Panel feels that work needs to be undertaken with schools and in the local community to raise awareness of the issue to encourage greater levels of reporting.

The Panel welcomes the setting up of the Miss U Project in Haringey as a positive move. In particular, it is now providing independent return home interviews for children and young people who have returned after going missing. However, the Panel notes that they are only able to provide these for a proportion of those who go missing. Such interviews should be undertaken independently and there is clear evidence that they are best done by a third sector organisation. The Panel is therefore of the view that sufficient capacity should be established to ensure that all children and young people who run away are provided with an opportunity to talk to an independent person by commissioning additional independent return home interviews from an appropriate third sector organisation.

Although such an arrangement may have some cost implications, it has the potential to save money in the long term by reducing the need for later interventions.

Recommendations:

1.   That the Council continue to monitor and report progress in supporting and protecting young runaways through the use of National Indicator 71 (paragraph 3.11).

2.   That, when available, the Council give specific consideration to signing up to the Children's Society's runaways charter (3.13).

3.   That, in order to enhance monitoring of progress, action in respect of children missing from both home and from care to be included within the LCSB Annual Report (5.5).

4.   That the Council consider, in consultation with partners, the setting of a finite time limit for unauthorised absences of children and young people (5.15).

5.   That the Children and Young People's Service, the Police and other relevant partners work together to explore how data and statistical information on missing children and young people can be better consolidated electronically and quality improved. (5.20).

6.   That risk assessments are updated automatically and as a matter of routine whenever children or young people go missing (5.29).

7.   That C&YPS work with foster carers to develop improved information sharing where there is a high risk of a young person going missing through the use of a suitable pro forma to record the information necessary to assist the Police, including provision of a recent photograph (6.18).

8.   That action be taken to improve support for foster carers after children or young people in their care have returned after going missing and, as part of this, all incidents be followed up by social workers to provide reassurance for carers that the situation is being monitored and, where appropriate, action being taken.(6.24).

9.   The Panel recommends that work be undertaken with the out of hours service provider to ensure that:
     - All reports of missing children or young people are followed up appropriately and foster carers are kept informed of progress; and
     - Information is appropriately recorded and accessible to operatives so that callers do not need to fully repeat details of incidents that have previously been reported (6.25).

10. That the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) within C&YPS works with schools and, in particular, the faith community to raise the profile of the issue, including training for designated teachers (7.11).

11. That action is taken to confirm that all children and young people who go missing

from care and from home are offered an independent return home interview on the basis outlined in the pan London procedures, with any shortfall identified met through the commissioning by C&YPS of additional capacity from an appropriate third sector organisation and that this be subject to regular monitoring and evaluation to ensure its cost effectiveness.

12. That residential care providers be requested to confirm that arrangements are in place for all Haringey children who are placed out-of-borough and go missing to receive an independent interview (8.20).

13. That C&YPS should seek to gain a greater understanding of the 'push' factors behind running away from Council care and seek to develop and deliver a strategy to address them. (8,21)

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 The review was set up in the light of a recommendation of the Scrutiny Review of Corporate Parenting in response to concerns that were raised in respect of missing children during the course of the review. It focused on each of the three specific categories of missing children and young people referred:
- 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.

1.2 The review noted the differences that exist in practices and procedures for dealing with the different categories that reflect their different circumstances.

Terms of Reference

1.3 The Terms of Reference for the review were as follows:

"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"

1.4 In undertaking the review, the Panel considered:
- Research documentation, national guidance and targets;
- Statistical evidence including relevant performance data and benchmarking;
- Comparison with other areas such as statistical neighbours; and
- Interviews with a range of stakeholders.

1.5 Evidence received from a range of stakeholders, including:
- Haringey Children and Young People's Service;
- First Response Team;
- Police Missing Persons Unit;
- Barnardos Miss U Project;
- Residential care providers and private fostering agencies; and
- Foster carers.

Consultation

1.6 Due to the nature of the young people involved, consulting directly with them proved to not be feasible. However, an indication of their views was obtained through questioning of people and organisations that work with them such as foster carers and Barnardos.

Membership

1.7 The membership of the Panel was as follows:
- Councillors: Alexander (Chair), Amin and Ejiofor
- Co-opted Members (voting): Ms. Y. Denny (church representative), Mr. A. Dauda, Ms. M. Ezeji and Ms. S. Young (parent governors.

2. INTRODUCTION

Definition

2.1 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".

2.2 There is an important distinction between this and 'unauthorised absence', which is where the whereabouts of looked after children (LAC) are known or thought to be known but unconfirmed. If a child's whereabouts are known, they cannot be considered as missing. In such circumstances, they may instead be classified as absent without authorisation from their placement.

Survey Data and Research Findings

2.3 The only authoritative studies to determine the numbers of children who run away have been undertaken by the Children's Society. They have now published three studies – in 1999, 2006 and 2011. Their third study on runaways was published in November 2011. It found that over 100,000 children still runaway every year, a similar figure to the previous surveys.

2.4 The Society has 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 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.

Why Young People Run Away

2.5 There is normally some sort of reason why children or young people run away and 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 as disabled or are having difficulties with learning;
   - Children whose parents' relationship has broken down.

2.6 Girls are more likely to run away than boys and most runaways 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.

2.7 The Panel received evidence from a number of stakeholders on the reasons why they felt that children and young people might run away. They felt that one key

driver was their wish to be with friends and socialise. There was also felt to be peer pressure to stay out late at night. Arguments with family could also be a factor and sometimes children or young people might not want to go home. Young people can also feel as if they are invincible and not be inclined to worry about potential risks. Running away can be exciting for them at first but it can be difficult to step back from such behaviour. They often did not wish to appear disloyal to their peers.

2.8   For children in care, there can be specific issues that make them more likely to run away. Some children can be put into care precisely because of their tendency to abscond. In addition, they may have previously suffered from a lack of boundaries. Some young people can feel oppressed by support from foster carers. It could also be the case that they do not want to be in care in the first place and prefer to be with their family elsewhere.

2.9   Most young people in care do not come from secure backgrounds and can seek solace with their peers. Furthermore, the fact that many of these young people in care have had to become very independent can contribute to the problem of absconding.

2.10 One residential care provider categorised children and young people who went missing from care into the following groups;

- Those who are placed in care within or close to their home areas who abscond to return to families and/or peer groups;

- Those placed in new areas that may have been involved in youth offending and had become beyond parental control. Typically these young people identified with anti-social peer groups quickly and could become involved in crime and drug use;

- Children and young people who have experienced extensive trauma. These children could abscond due the intensity of being cared for, their disorganisation and inability to regulate. When these children ran away, they often had no clarity of where they were going, nor did they have external social support networks. They therefore placed themselves at high risk;

- Children and young people who have been taken into care to remove them from abusive families or trafficking or prostitution. The conditioning of these children or young people often encouraged them to return to the perpetrators.

2.11 A lot of young people in care do not trust adults. Some have the attitude that foster carers are just doing a job. The view expressed by residential care providers and private foster care agencies was that dealing with runaways was, to some extent, just part and parcel of working with young people in care. Absconding is not normally a reflection on care or carers – it is more an indication of where the young person came from.

2.12 For a small number of young people, there is a pattern of running away. It is nevertheless not a widespread issue. If it is out of character, there are higher levels of concern. If it is a regular occurrence, this can be less alarming. Whilst there were broad and general reasons why young people ran away, they can also be individual ones.

Risks

2.13 Children who run away can place themselves at considerable risk. In particular, there is danger from 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 that 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 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.

2.14 The Children's Society 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.

Cost

2.15 The Children's Society 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 in the least 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.

2.16 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.

3.   STATUTORY GUIDANCE

3.1   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.

3.2   The Police have lead responsibility for dealing with missing children. However, is the responsibility of local government and its partners to safeguard the young and vulnerable, including young runaways. This is normally done through the Local Children's Safeguarding Board (LCSB).

3.3   The new guidance put greater emphasis on the importance of young runaways being offered an independent return home 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.

3.4   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.

3.5   The various pieces of guidance that were issued 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 (LCSBs) are required to define clearly in protocols the roles and responsibilities of different agencies in order to ensure a co-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;
- NProcedures 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;
- NA 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.

3.6   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.

3.7 NI 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 criterion:
- 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.

3.8 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. However, the Panel expressed concern that C&YPS had shown no evidence that it was collating information enabling it to understand the underlying reasons behind children and young people running away that could justify this assessment.

Concerns

3.9 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.

3.10 Haringey's Missing from Care and from Home Action Plan was linked directly to National Indicator 71. Although the indicator has now been scrapped by the government, the Action Plan is being kept by the Council.

3.11 The Panel welcomes the fact that the Action Plan is being kept by the Council. It notes that it is now at the discretion of local authorities to decide which targets to keep in place. A small number have pledged to continue to report on National Indicator 71 and the Panel is of the view that Haringey should join this group. Although the indicator is flawed – being based on self evaluation - it may nevertheless assist the Council in retaining a focus on children who run away as

part of the performance information on child protection.

Recommendation:
That the Council continue to monitor and report progress in supporting and protecting young runaways through the use of National Indicator 71.

3.12 The Panel received evidence from the Children's Society about their current "Make Runaways Safe" campaign. The current campaign includes number of activities, including lobbying. They had recently issued a number of documents relating to this including new statistics and a report on sexual exploitation. They are currently working in many local areas as part of the local phase of the campaign.

3.13 As part of the campaign, a Freedom of Information request had been made to all local authorities about missing children in their area. The Panel expressed concern that it took Haringey Council three months to respond to this request, providing information that should have been readily available and easily accessible.

3.14 95% of local authorities had responded to this so far. The responses received from local authorities to date had shown a mixed picture with some examples of good practice. The intention was for the Society to create a runaways charter including standards of engagement. They would be asking each local authority to sign up to this.

Recommendation:
That, when available, the Council give specific consideration to signing up to the Children's Society's runaways charter.

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4. PAN LONDON APPROACH AND ISSUES

Introduction

4.1 There is a large concentration of children in London which makes it essential for there to be clear expectations of all agencies working within the capital. Pan London procedures on safeguarding children missing from care or from home were therefore developed, which Haringey follows.

Pan London Procedures

4.2 The procedures broadly follow the statutory guidelines and have 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 procedures and highlight responsibilities in risk assessing the distinction between "missing" and "unauthorised absence".

4.3 The London procedures note the fact that looked after children (LAC) are over represented amongst those children who go missing. They state that an assessment of the risk of the child "absenting him/herself" must be made prior to each placement by children's social care services. Where there are concerns that the child will go missing, a risk assessment should be undertaken. This should cover a number of issues, including:
- The level of supervision that it is proposed to provide for the child;
- The degree of risk to the child if they go missing; and
- The views of parents/carers on the child's needs and the action that needs to be taken if their child goes missing.

4.4 Where the risk assessment concludes that there is a high risk of a child going missing, the procedure states that as a matter of good practice the residential unit or foster carer should be provided with an information sharing form that contains information that the Police and others may need to locate the child if they go missing.

4.5 The importance of reporting children who go missing is emphasised and the procedures state that failure on the part of parents or guardians may be raised as a child protection issue. It also mentions the fact that children who repeatedly go missing are often viewed as a problem and recognises that insufficient consideration is given to the reason why they keep absenting themselves.

4.6 The procedures state that the Police should be notified as soon as possible and emphasise their role as the lead agency. The Police do not, however, have the power to use force to take children into Police protection. The procedures recommend that the child's school should always be informed as they may have valuable information that may help to establish the child's location.

4.7 In the case of LAC, where the information available suggests that it is an instance of "unauthorised absence", the residential unit or foster carer "should take all reasonable and practical steps which a good parent would take to secure the safe and speedy return of the child e.g. visiting addresses where the child may be or telephoning around known friends". They should also be the subject of continuous risk assessment whilst they remain absent.

4.8   Joint consideration should also be given to adopting a finite time limit within which a child may stay in the "unauthorised absence" category, after which they would be considered to be missing.

4.9   There is a responsibility on residential units to maintain records of each occasion when a LAC is identified as either missing are having taken unauthorised absence. These records should be made available for inspection. Foster carers should also keep similar information.

4.10   On return, the procedures state the Police will interview all children to establish whether they are "safe and well" and that no criminal activity occurred whilst they were missing or was the cause of them going missing.

4.11   Children should also be informed that they would be expected to talk about their absence to an independent person.   This opportunity should be provided within 72 hours of them returning. The purpose of this is to try and understand the reasons why the child may have run away and to try and avoid it happening again. It can also assist in ensuring that they are provided with any support that may be necessary. In the case of residential children's homes, it can also help to ensure that there are no issues relating to it, which is an important issue for the local authority responsible for the placement.   Children who have repeated "unauthorised absences" should also be offered an interview with an independent person.

4.12   For looked after children, it is the responsibility of the residential unit or supervising social worker and the placing authority to ensure that the interviews take place. For other children, it is the Police and children's social services that are responsible for arranging this.

4.13   There are a wide number of individuals who could be considered suitable to conduct the interview but the key issue is that they should be separate from the Police or children's social services. The procedures state that the independent person could come from amongst the following:
   - A social worker other than the child's social worker, if they have one;
   - A teacher, school nurse, Connexions, youth or YOT worker;
   - A voluntary sector practitioner or a police officer whom the child knows or trusts.

4.14   The procedure emphasises that the child should be asked who they want to speak to.

   GoL Report on Young Runaways in London

4.15   In 2010, a report was published on behalf of the Government Office for London (GOL) which provided GOL and other stakeholders with an up to date picture of the situation for young runaways in London. It made a number of findings;

   - It found that the quality of data remained inadequate with little sustained and co-ordinated improvement in London since an earlier Social Exclusion Unit report from 2002. This made it difficult to determine the extent and nature of running away. It was caused, in part, by differences in definition and the various methods and timescales of collecting and collating data. The Metropolitan Police use the Merlin system which is used for recording all missing people and

includes data on age, gender and ethnicity. However, the data quality provided by Merlin was found to be variable with potential for interrogation limited.

- Concern was expressed regarding the extent to which the use of protocols were monitored and the lack of consequence for non-compliance. Protocols were found to be generally understood among senior and middle management, but there was evidence of a lack of awareness and adherence amongst front line staff.

- Where local authorities delivered services themselves, these tended to focus on either preventative or reactive provision. Where local authorities had engaged external or voluntary sector organisations, this offered a more comprehensive approach. There were found to be some examples where return home interviews were conducted independently. However, they were still often conducted just by the Police, with little responsibility of follow up.

- It was common in London for a local authority to classify the police 'Safe and Well' interview as a return home interview, despite the widespread acknowledgement that this check was ineffective in addressing the young persons needs or preventing further episodes. Young runaways frequently felt animosity towards the Police and officers did not have time to establish a relationship. A recurrent view within the consultations with the Police was that the local authorities that were effective at tackling runaways were the ones where either a third sector organisation conduct the return interviews or where Police officers had been embedded within third sector organisations as part of their return interview strategy.

- Whilst there were a number of pieces of work that suggested the cost effectiveness of early interventions, a comprehensive cost benefit analysis of provision in London was not possible due to lack of data.

5.   MISSING CHILDREN IN HARINGEY

Introduction

5.1   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. There are a large number of children's residential homes in the borough that take children from other local authorities; and
3. Children missing from home.

5.2   No distinction is made in procedures between which local authority or organisation runs a residential children's home within the borough. This means that Haringey not only has to consider its own children and young people but also those that are placed within the borough by other local authorities.

5.3   The Police Missing Persons Unit has a duty to notify relevant social services departments of instances where children have gone missing. However, any involvement of children's social care services does not override the overall responsibility of the Police. Following notification of a child or young person going missing, the Police try to gain an understanding of the circumstances and make an assessment, including consideration of whether the child is at risk.

5.4   The named officer with overall responsibility for children and young people who go missing or run away in Haringey is Wendy Tomlinson, the Head of Commissioning and Placements. The day-to-day responsibility is carried out by case managers. There is an established multi agency officer steering group that monitors practice issues relating to instances of children and young people who go missing. Issues of concern are reported to the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee and the Local Children's Safeguarding Board (LCSB). Data is kept and used to analyse any patterns.

5.5   The Panel is of the view that local monitoring by Members and senior officers and partners of support for children and young people who go missing from care and from home would be further enhanced through annual reporting of progress. It therefore recommends that action in respect of children missing from both home and from care to be included within the LCSB annual report.


Recommendation:
That, in order to enhance monitoring of progress, action in respect of children missing from both home and from care to be included within the LCSB Annual Report.

Statistics

5.6   The Police Missing Persons Team, as the lead agency for dealing with missing people, maintain full statistics on the number of missing people, including children, as well as intelligence. The Council only keeps information on children missing from

their own care. The definition of "missing" that is used is that the whereabouts of the individual are unknown. This is determined by whoever has reported the instance.

5.7 Prior to 2010, Haringey had the highest number of missing persons of any London borough. This was mainly due to loose interpretation of the relevant guidelines and definitions and especially the distinction between missing and unauthorised absence. This was addressed by the Police in consultation with the Children and Young People's Service (C&YPS). The work undertaken has enabled Haringey to move from having the highest levels of missing people in London to 11th highest:

Missing people (no. of instances) across London boroughs August 2010-October 2011
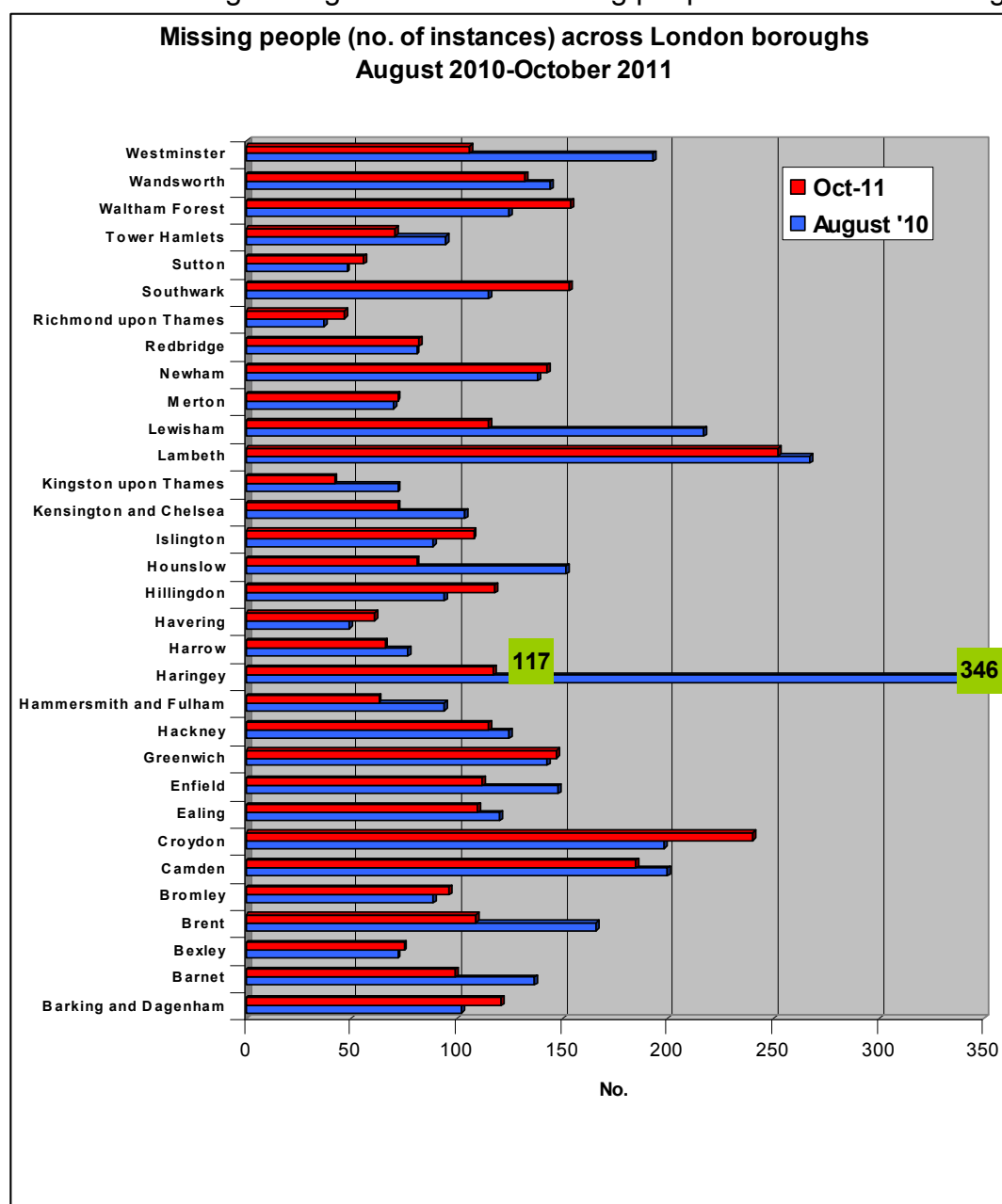
5.8 Detailed Police statistics for missing persons and, in particular, children and young people, in August 2010 and 2011 show in detail the change. In all cases, Police statistics refer to *instances* and not individuals.

Category	Aug. 2010	Aug. 2011	Change	% Change
All	346	120	- 226	- 65.3

Juveniles (all)	287	70	- 217	- 75.6
Juveniles (care home)	225	26	- 199	- 88.5
Juveniles (foster care)	30	15	- 15	- 50
Juveniles (not in care)	32	29	- 3	- 9.4

5.9   Statistics for September 2010 to September 2011 and October 2010 to October 2011 show the continuing trend:

	Sept. 2010	Sept. 2011	Change	% Change
All	272	141	- 131	- 48.2
Juveniles (all)	211	94	- 117	- 55.6

	Oct. 2010	Oct. 2011	Change	% Change
All	268	117	-152	- 56.3
Juveniles (all)	192	66	- 126	- 65.6

5.10   The month by month trend is as follows:

	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
All	346	272	268	207	190	160	153	207	193	193	185	196	120	141	117
Juveniles	287	211	192	156	133	110	110	149	156	137	130	140	70	94	66
Juveniles as %	82.9	77.6	71.6	75.4	70	68.8	71.0	71.5	80.8	71.0	70.3	71.4	58.3	66.7	56.4

5.11   The trend can also be shown as a graph:

Missing people reports; Haringey August 2010-October 2011.
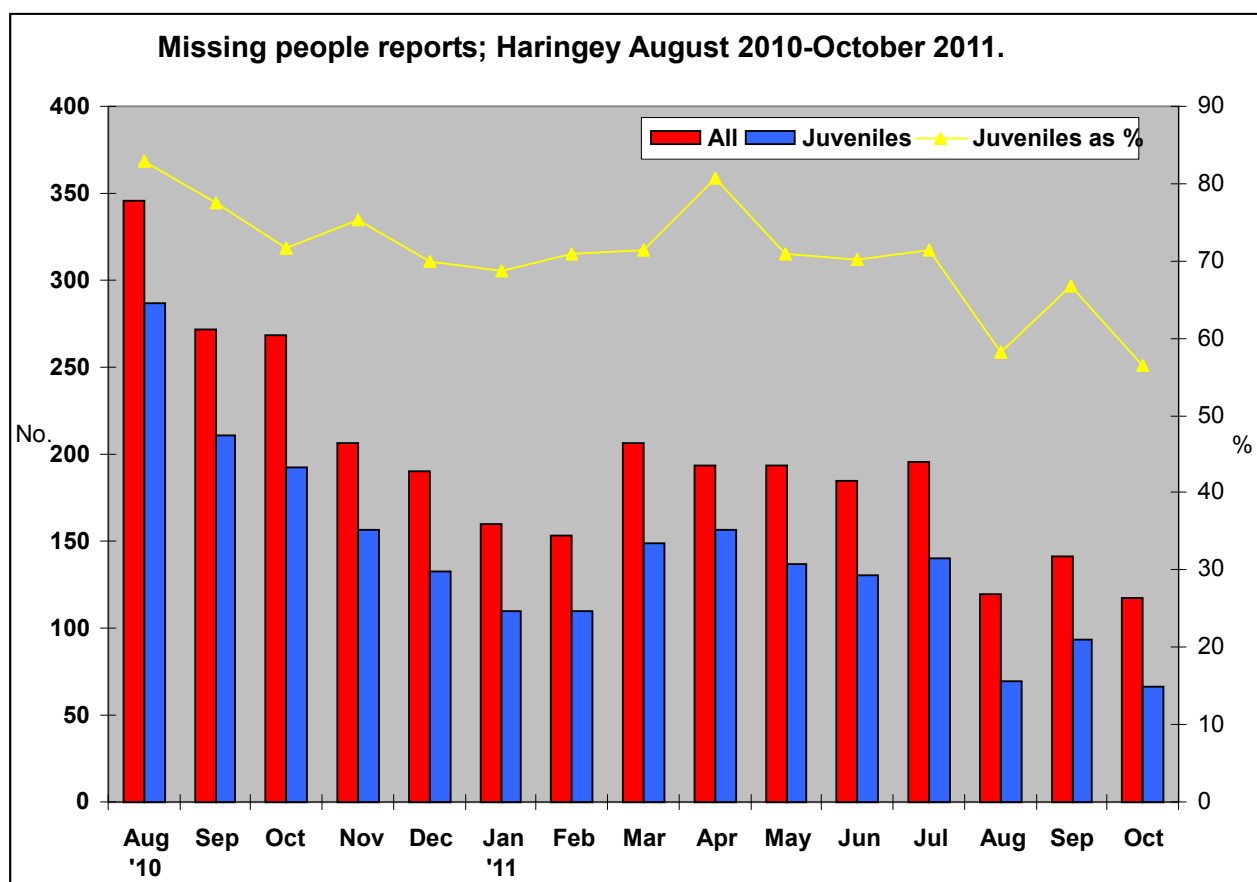
5.12   The statistics show how the large number of children and young people who were being inaccurately classified as missing distorted Police statistics.   The biggest

change has come from children who had previously been reported missing from residential care homes, where there has been an 88% reduction. The Panel noted that there was now a much better grasp amongst them of the guidelines and this has enabled more focussed work to be undertaken with the children and young people who are most at risk.   The Police are continuing to work with care homes within Haringey to reduce the number of unauthorised absences and specific training has been undertaken.
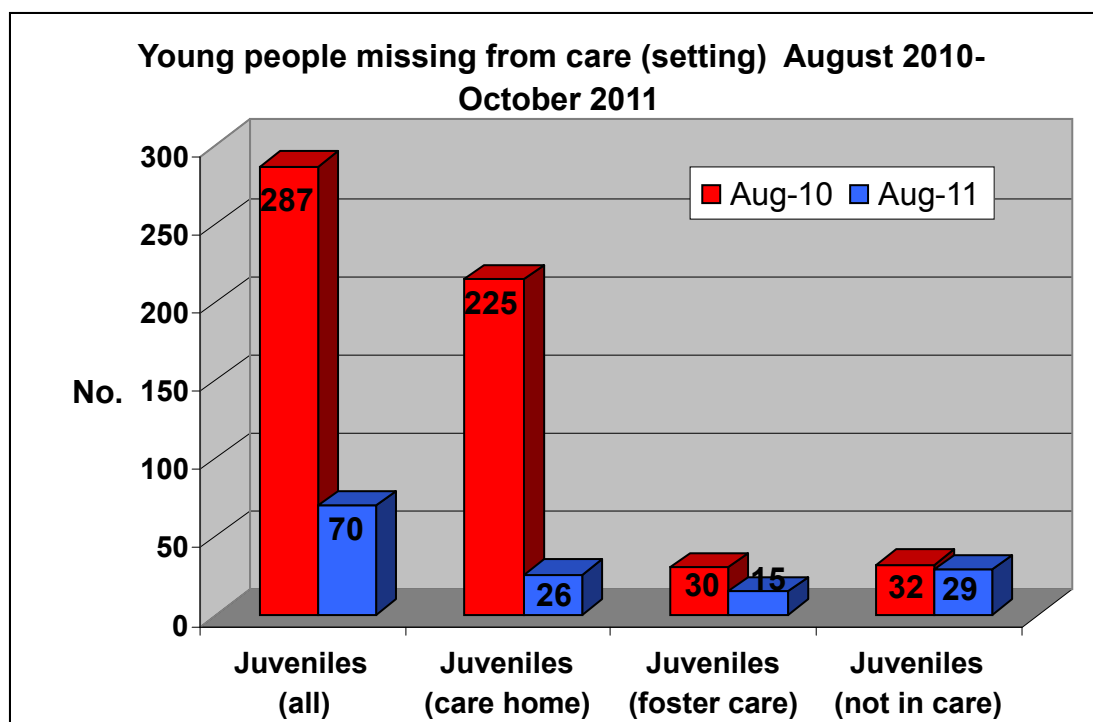
5.13   The distinction between 'missing' and unauthorised absence' is important and is made in order to ensure a proportionate response. It enables professionals to focus attention on those at potentially the greatest level of risk. However, this does not necessarily mean that children and young people who are instead classified as absent without authorisation are *not* at risk and this was pointed out by a number of stakeholders that the Panel received evidence from. It was noted, however, that the distinction can be overridden if there are any child protection concerns as the safety of children and young people is paramount.

5.14   In cases of unauthorised absence, it is still necessary for liaison to take place with the Police but residential providers that gave evidence to the Panel felt that they were generally less willing to act.   The Panel also heard that it can be difficult and potentially dangerous for foster carers and residential staff to go looking for young people in such circumstances. Whilst the Police may be better placed to do this, they may not always have the resources available.

5.15   The Panel is of the view that, as suggested in the London procedures, the Council and its partners should jointly consider the setting of a finite local time limit for unauthorised absences of children and young people. After this time limit has passed, they should automatically be considered to be missing. This could assist in addressing instances of unauthorised absence where there may be grounds for concern.


Recommendation:
That the Council consider, in consultation with partners, the setting of a finite time limit for unauthorised absences of children and young people.

Looked After Children (LAC)

5.16   The highest prevalence of children and young people who run away is amongst LAC and, in particular, those in residential care homes. It should be reiterated that the figures refer to instances and not individuals.

Young people missing from care (setting) August 2010-October 2011

Placement of children when they go missing or abscond since April 2011

5.17 Figures produced by C&YPS on the placement of children who went missing between April and September 2011 break this down further:
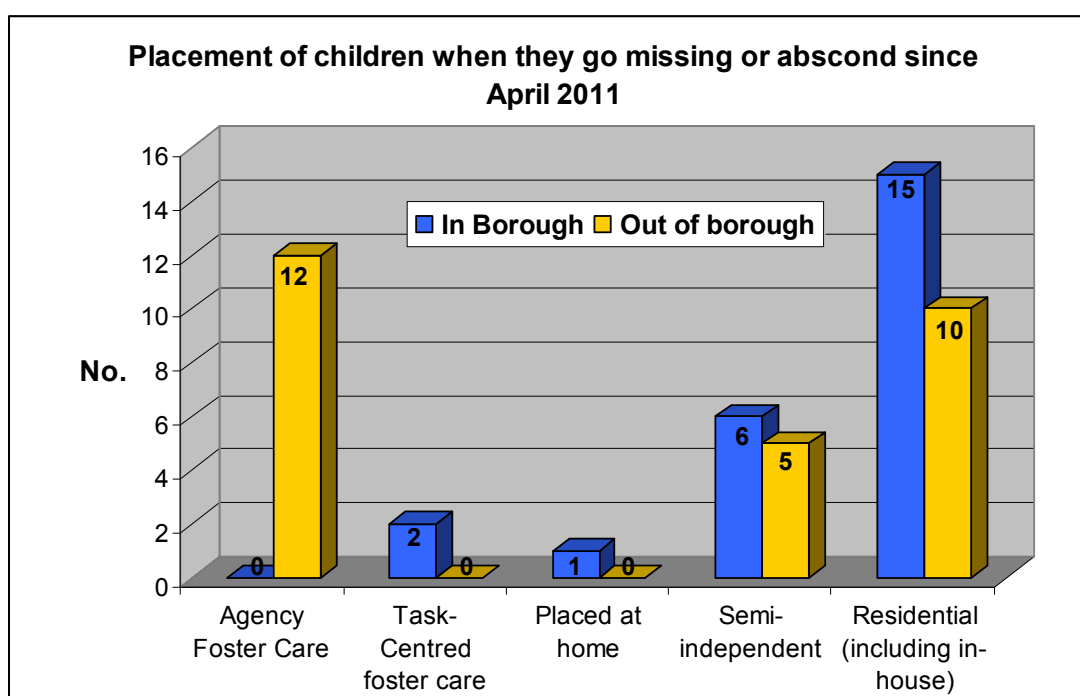
5.18 This is in keeping with national trends and to be expected as some young people are placed in residential homes precisely because of their tendency to run away. It was the view of officers from C&YPS that Haringey's statistics for children missing from care were not much different to those of other boroughs, despite the fact that it has around twice as many looked after children as many outer London boroughs.

5.19 The statistics put together by the Police for the Panel were done using their Merlin

system. The system has some shortcomings and it can be difficult to interrogate for specific pieces of data. This was highlighted in the previously mentioned GoL report. The figures for juveniles had to be manually extracted, which can be a time consuming job. The Merlin system is used across London by the Metropolitan Police so there is limited scope for local improvements to be made by the Police locally.

5.20 The Panel noted that records have to be kept by residential homes and foster carers of missing children and that these are kept in manual format. In addition, records are also kept by C&YPS on referrals as well as children missing from care. In addition, some statistical information is now kept by the Miss U project on work that they undertake.

5.21 The Panel is of the view that there is scope for improvement in the quality and comprehensiveness of statistics. It notes that some other London boroughs have undertaken specific work in this area, such as Brent. Better data would enable potential issues and patterns to be more easily identified and therefore interventions to be better focussed and evidence based.

Recommendation:
That the Children and Young People's Service, the Police and other relevant partners work together to explore how data and statistical information on missing children and young people can be better consolidated electronically and quality improved.

Residential Care

5.22 It was the view of the Police Missing Persons Unit representative that the Panel received evidence from that there had been a tendency amongst some residential social workers to ring the Police if there was any doubt about the whereabouts of a young person. In many cases, the absence was due to a young person staying out late. The Panel noted that an appropriate time for young people to return back in the evening to their care home should be decided before they are placed and included in the risk assessment. Advice can be obtained by the care home manager from officers in C&YPS and, where appropriate, parents or guardians.

5.23 The Police Missing Persons Unit is continuing to work with residential homes to improve how they deal with incidents. Further work needs to be undertaken to ensure that all residential staff are aware of their responsibilities and the fact that missing children are not just the responsibility of the Police. They felt that there were mixed approaches amongst residential care providers regarding whether they should seek to find young people who had not returned. There is nothing that prevents them from taking action themselves to locate children or young people and their responsibilities do not end with reporting. However, they need the necessary resources to be available in order to do this. The Police have to assess the level of risk and also balance this against resources that were available to them.

5.24 As part of the risk assessment process, residential care homes are responsible for reporting any incidents to the allocated social worker. If there are concerns, the Police can be involved and the risk assessment reviewed. However, it was noted

risk assessments undertaken by the Police are different to those undertaken by care homes.

5.25 Police involvement does not just come from the Missing Persons Unit. Amongst others, the Vice Unit can also be involved. All Police officers are trained in how to deal with missing children. In many cases, there are limited powers unless court action is taken. In order for this to be successful, a risk of immediate harm needed to be clearly demonstrated.

5.26 The Panel noted that great lengths can be gone to by statutory services in order to get back children who were absent. This included court orders allowing children to be recovered from addresses and jailing individuals who are unwilling to divulge where a child or young person is. If need be, looked after children can be placed away from their home area in order to reduce the risk of them absconding and sometimes expensive out-of-borough placements are used for this purpose. These can be used for young people who are in gangs, who often prove difficult to deal with. It is occasionally necessary to place children in secure accommodation. Social services can agree for this to happen for any period up to 72 hours. Any period longer than this has to be agreed by a court. This is generally undertaken just as a temporary safety measure.

5.27 The Panel noted that sanctions can be used to discourage young people from going missing again. If they persisted in running away, their care plan could be re-visited and, where appropriate, a planned move to another residential home considered. It is possible that there might be something in the children's home that they were placed in that they did not like that was behind them running away. It might also be possible that they were absconding to a specific place for a reason. It was necessary to analyse the available information and identify any patterns.

Risk Assessments

5.28 The view of officers from C&YPS that the Panel received evidence from was that the key challenge was that of risk assessment. Whilst there are often instances where there is no concern for the safety of individuals, there were other cases where there are considerable concerns. There was now greater clarity about whether there was cause for concern through the effective use of risk assessments. It was frequently the case that professionals were reasonably sure about the whereabouts of a child although it might not be possible for them to be absolutely certain.

5.29 Risk could be present irrespective of whether children or young people were categorised as missing or "unauthorised absence". Risk assessments and specific strategies are developed to address the needs of individual children. Although risk can be minimised, it cannot be eliminated completely. It was important to keep channels of communication open and develop good and trusting relationships with children and young people.

5.30 Officers from C&YPS were of the view that risk assessments had improved and especially the actual assessment of the relevant risk and that there was no longer an over reliance on Police action. The Panel welcomes the improvement. However, it notes that risk assessments are currently not routinely updated when children or young people go missing. It therefore recommends that risk assessments are updated automatically and as a matter of routine when children or

young people go missing.

Recommendation:
That risk assessments are updated automatically and as a matter of routine when children or young people go missing.

6. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN - STAKEHOLDER VIEWS

6.1   The Panel asked private fostering agencies, residential providers and foster carers for their views regarding children and young people who go missing from care.

Private Fostering Agencies and Residential Providers

6.2   The Panel received evidence from the representatives of private fostering agencies and residential providers, including the two Council run homes. They dealt with a range of local authorities, including Haringey.

6.3   Fostering agencies stated that it normally takes time for children and young people to develop a bond with new foster carers. In such circumstances, engagement is important. Where a bond is established, young people can be less tempted to stay out late or run away as they do not want to let their carer down. It can be hard to change patterns but it is not impossible. They emphasised the importance of engaging with the young person to establish the reasons why they were running away. This needed to involve the young person's wider network. Foster carers have a particular role to play by developing their relationship with the young person. Part of this can involve emphasising the benefits of not absconding.

6.4   Fostering agencies and residential providers ensure that all carers and relevant staff are aware of procedures through their induction programmes. Children and young people also have individualised risk management and crisis management plans. Policies are updated in connection with local police guidelines.

6.5   They sated that the role of the foster carers when young people went missing was not passive. In addition to contacting the social worker and, if appropriate, the Police, foster carers could contact friends and other contacts as well as looking for them. They should immediately phone the out-of-hours social work team and report each and every instance.

6.6   The Panel heard that the experience of residential children's homes was very similar to that of foster care agencies. Their priority was to make sure young people were safe. All young people were provided with a mobile phone so that the home could at least call and speak to them if they went missing. Homes tried to negotiate with and encourage young people. However, the draw of peer groups was difficult to break. They tried to provide a safe haven that young people knew they could come back to. Getting them to come back home earlier was progress. Boredom could also be a factor as the homes could not always provide young people with the activities that they wanted to do.   This was particularly true of older children. Some young people could be used to being out late and it could take a long time to change their behaviour.

6.7   There were differences between age groups and plans needed to reflect this. Whilst it was possible to provide activities for 16 – 18 year olds, they often did not want to join in. They preferred to be with friends and such attitudes could be ingrained. They may have only been in care for a short period and mix with young people who were living semi-independently.   In such circumstances, it was difficult to enforce specific times that young people should return by and this could result in them being classified as missing.   17 year olds could be particularly difficult to place and sometimes they were not given the best placement but merely the best available.

6.8 The Police were the key agency in dealing with missing young people and had their own procedures for dealing with the issue. The Police response was variable but it was recognised that their resources were finite and often over stretched. The response of the Police Missing Persons team was likely to be different to that of other Police officers. They stated that care services were proactive in assessing risk whilst the Police had a more reactive role. The process for dealing with missing children could become taxing and a greater level of joined up thinking would be welcome. It could sometimes appear that not all agencies and organisations were pulling in the same direction.

6.9 All services were focussed first and foremost on the child or young person. Residential homes would have regular one-to-one sessions with them and try to build up a relationship. It was important to make them understand that services had their welfare at heart. If a child or young person went missing who was considered to be high risk, the home would try to look for them straight away. The Police could not do this due to the need to first go through their procedures.

6.10 Fostering agencies felt that it was sometimes the case that they were more concerned about young people than local authorities appeared to be. Social workers often had very heavy caseloads. It could sometimes take time for Emergency Duty Teams (EDTs) to report incidents back to social workers and it could be necessary for agencies to follow up reports themselves to ensure that action was taken. If was rare for allocated social workers to ring up the next day after an incident had been reported.

6.11 The social worker paid an important part in the young person's life. However, there was often a lack of continuity with frequent changes in the allocated social worker. Although it was a big issue in Haringey, it was also an issue in other areas. This was mainly due to heavy turnover of social workers. Contact from social workers was important and regular contact could matter a lot to young people, even if it was just through regular phone calls. As soon as the social worker changed, the relationship was lost. After two or three changes in social workers, young people could stop bothering to engage.

6.12 There was not much difference in how individual authorities dealt with missing children though some could be slightly more proactive than others in their approach. Follow up meetings to discuss missing children did not always take place with some authorities. Although authorities had different procedures, they were all broadly similar and any differences generally arose from interpreted. Procedures were felt to be generally sound and issues were normally more concerned with their application and personnel matters. In particular, approaches were not always consistent. Good quality placement meetings could help to prevent problems arising.

6.13 Foster carers received considerable amounts of training with between three and ten sessions taking place every year. In terms of missing children, training sessions would look at the wider position and how to best engage with the young person and address their emotional well being. Children who absconded could deter carers and cause them considerable anxiety.

Foster carers

6.14 The Panel received evidence from a number of foster carers from Haringey Foster Carers Association. Whilst there was no specific section in training for foster carers on dealing with missing children, the issue could be covered as part of training on challenging behaviour. Foster carers tended to learn how to deal with situations from talking to social workers and from their own experience. They felt that nothing could adequately prepare them for having to cope with children going missing, although they felt that they were aware of what to do. There could be no prior warning.

6.15 There were limits to what they could do in response to young people running away. They felt that they there was not much that could be done to deter them from running away again as sanctions were limited and could often be ineffective. Young people could be difficult to track down. For example, they often switched their mobiles off so that they could not be contacted. Some young people who were fostered had come from homes where there were few boundaries. They might also not listen to parental figures, which could also be the reason why they were in care. Some carers stated that they would go and look for young people when they went missing but this was not always possible if they had other children to look after.

6.16 They knew to contact the out of hours service (EDT) when incidents occurred. The response from services was variable. If the child or young person had not been with the carer for long, foster carers could have difficulty describing the young person to the Police. Providing carers with photographs of the child or young person would help.

6.17 The Panel notes that that the London procedures state that where there is a high risk of a child going missing, it is good practice for residential unit or foster carers to prepare an information sharing form containing the information the police and other agencies will need to locate the child if they do go missing This form should always be provided to the Police at the time of reporting a Looked After Child missing. The Panel is of the view that work should be undertaken by C&YPS to ensure that foster carers are able to give the Police all the information necessary should the young person in their care go missing through the use of information sharing pro formas and that such information should include a recent photograph.

Recommendation:
That C&YPS work with foster carers to develop improved information sharing where there is a high risk of a young person going missing through the use of a suitable pro forma to record the information necessary to assist the Police, including provision of a recent photograph.

6.18 The foster carers stated they sometimes received a follow up phone call from the child or young person's social worker after they had returned after running away. The child's social worker was very important and one who was strong could make a big difference. There could be a lack of consistency which was exacerbated by the heavy turnover of social workers. They recognised that many social workers had a very heavy case load and could get stressed or burned out.

6.19 When young people went missing, it was often necessary to repeat the history of the

case many times. The out of hours team (EDT) very rarely called back to see if the young person had returned or to provide an update. The foster carers felt that the EDT could be improved. It appeared to not be possible for staff to access information from the previous night and carers were therefore required to repeat all the information that they had previously given. There was also the need to repeat information to different Police officers. Sometimes a number of different Police stations could be involved and it was necessary to deal with enquiries from them all.

6.20 Carers felt that better support could be provided for carers during and after an incident. In particular, following up of incidents would be much appreciated, if only to acknowledge and update foster carers. This would make it less stressful for them and make them feel that professionals empathised fully with their situation. They were not fully aware of procedures in respect of follow up interviews after children had been located and/or returned.

6.21 The Panel concurs that there is a need for improved support for foster carers after children or young people in their care have returned going missing. In particular, incidents should routinely be followed up by social workers to provide reassurance for foster carers that the situation is being monitored and, where appropriate, action being taken.

Recommendation:
That action be taken to improve support for foster carers after children or young people in their care have returned after going missing and, as part of this, all incidents be followed up by social workers to provide reassurance for carers that the situation is being monitored and, where appropriate, action being taken.

6.22 The Panel notes the foster carers, residential care providers and private fostering agencies were all of the view that the response of the out of hours service (EDT) could be improved. In particular, there was a need to reduce the need to repeat information and reassurance given that all incidents will be followed up appropriately.

Recommendation
The Panel recommends that work be undertaken with the out of hours service provider to ensure that:
- *All reports of missing children or young people are followed up appropriately and foster carers are kept informed of progress; and*
- *Information is appropriately recorded and accessible to operatives so that callers do not need to fully repeat details of incidents that have previously been reported.*
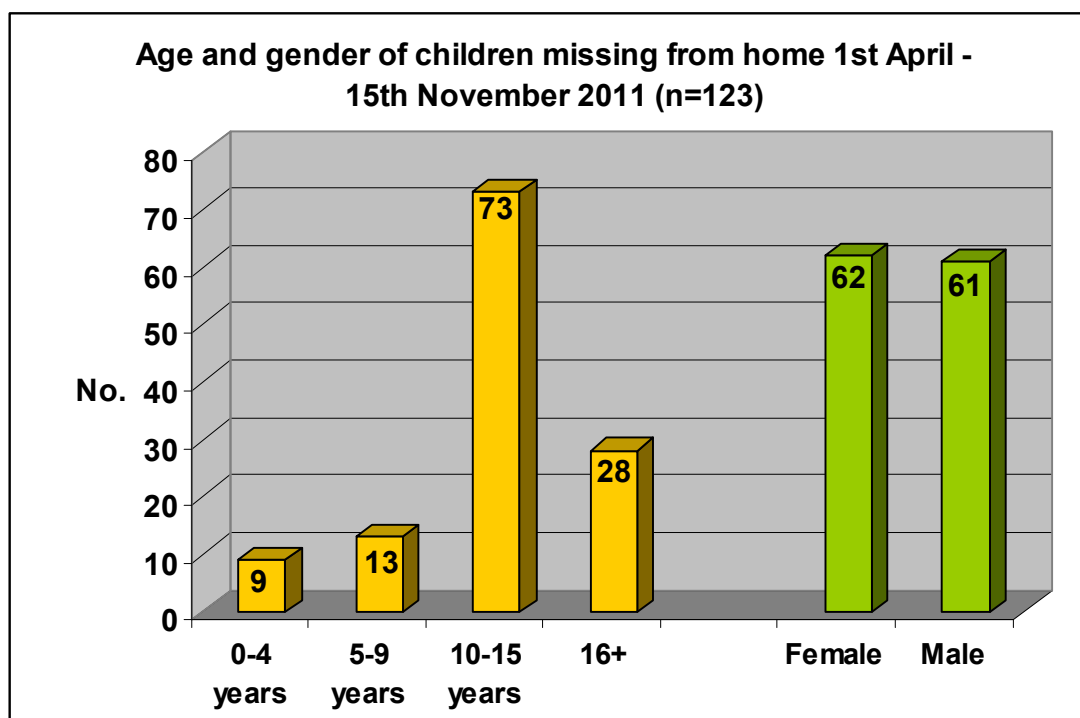
7. CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME

7.1 The Panel received evidence from the Head of First Response on the response to children who go missing from home. These generally fall into the following three categories:

- Children who return home late from a school or for an arranged day time activity and had been reported missing by the parents. These are categorised as "unauthorised absences."
- Children who return home late from an evening activity and are reported missing. These could merely indicate that young people are pushing boundaries but could also possibly mean unhappiness or risk at home or in the community including, in some instances, gang related activity or sexual exploitation. In such instances, there could be a discussion with parents to see if the incident constituted unauthorised absence or a missing episode.
- Children who are missing for longer including overnight. The lead agency for this is the Police.

7.2 The Panel noted that between 1 April and 15 November 2011, 123 children were reported as missing from home on 139 occasions. Of these, 5 children went missing on 2 occasions, 1 child went missing on 3 occasions and 3 children went missing on 4 occasions. However, these figures also include unauthorised absence. Future reports will distinguish between missing children and unauthorised absences. This clearer distinction will assist in highlighting the specific cases that require intervention. Of the children identified as going missing on more than one occasion, all were aged between 13 -18.

7.3 The age breakdown was as follows:

Age and gender of children missing from home 1st April - 15th November 2011 (n=123)

Category	No.
0-4 years	9
5-9 years	13
10-15 years	73
16+	28
Female	62
Male	61

7.4 Gender breakdown was as follows:

Female	62

Male	61

7.5 All cases were reviewed by the Head of Service, First Response. The majority were assessed as 'unauthorised absence'. Only one child was missing for more than 4 hours. This was a Roma child who had possibly been trafficked

Reported lost in a public place	18
Returned late from school safely	5
Reported as not in school and whereabouts unknown – both Roma families. One found and one reported to the police as suspected trafficking	2
Initial Assessment carried out. These cases all related to children who had previously been known to C&YPS and, in one case, a baby reported missing but subsequently found with parents at a new address	4

7.6 Many children who were recorded as missing had become separated from the parents in Wood Green Shopping City and found quickly. A number others had been testing boundaries. Of children under the age of 11 who had gone missing, 13 children had been lost in a public space, 2 had been reported as not in school and 4 had returned late from a school related activity.

7.7 Statistics are examined regularly by officers. Some children were only missing for a short period of time. There were approximately 3 to 4 instances per week. The figure was sometimes higher in summer. Most instances were just overnight. However, some children or young people could be absent for 3 to 4 weeks but in such cases it was often known where they were likely to be.

Reporting

7.8 The Panel noted that children are brought to the attention of First Response from several sources. The primary source is the Police. All missing children who have come to the notice of the Police are logged onto the Police Merlin system. Children may be reported missing by other agencies, including schools.

7.9 The Panel noted that procedures are clear that, where other agencies report a child or young person as missing and those with parental responsibility or care of the child have not done so, this constitutes significant harm. Children missing from school are referred to First Response if there is evidence that they are a victim of crime, if they are the subject of a child protection plan, if they are looked after, privately fostered, subject to an ongoing investigation, are constantly avoiding contact or are they are deemed at risk due to issues such as criminal activity, forced marriage or honour based violence.

7.10 The service is reliant on cases being reported, which does not always happen. Schools and the Education Welfare Service were particularly good at flagging up issues of concern. It was noted that the UK Border Agency were responsible for dealing with any cases of trafficking. Some children had been repatriated and there were good links with the Bulgarian and Romanian authorities. The service had access to a Roma specialist, who was currently working with 25 families within Haringey.   There were very good relationships with partners and there was now a multi agency safeguarding hub.

7.11 The Panel is of the view that there is a need to increase the profile of the issue of missing children in order to encourage a higher level of reporting. There is strong evidence from research by the Children's Society and others that there is currently under reporting of children and young people who go missing from home. As part of this, work should be done within the community in Haringey to increase awareness and encourage wider reporting of concerns.

Recommendation:
That the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) within C&YPS works with schools and, in particular, the faith community to raise the profile of the issue, including training for designated teachers.

8. THE MISS U PROJECT

Introduction

8.1 The Panel received evidence from the Miss U Project that is currently operating within Haringey. The project is the result of collaboration with Railway Children, who have a long history of working with runaways and have been particularly active outside of the UK. They are now seeking to develop their services within this country and working in collaboration with Barnardos. A Barnardos project has been working within Camden for 10 years and services are now being replicated in Haringey and Islington. They have a project worker in both boroughs and, in Haringey, she has been seconded to work for three days per week within the Council. The service is relatively new, having only begun in the borough in November. Aviva funds all the direct work and the worker's salary whilst Barnardo's contribute to the management and overhead costs from their Voluntary Funds.

Outcomes

8.2 There are four specific outcomes that the project is aiming to achieve in Haringey;
   - Children having a better understanding of safe options;
   - Reduction in risk;
   - Episodes of children going missing reduced; and
   - An enhanced relationship with the primary carer.

8.3 The service aims to increase early identification of risk, whilst developing partnerships and securing a co-ordinated inter-agency response. They undertake a number of services, such as drop in sessions for runaways and awareness training for professionals. They work closely with the Police and the Children and Young People's Service, schools, the Police Missing Persons Unit and the Youth Service. They are now part of the multi agency safeguarding hub (MASH).

8.4 They are currently undertaking independent return home interviews (RHI) for children who have recently returned after going missing. Referrals are received from children's social care and the Police. They aim to make contact with children within 72 hours. The service is voluntary for the child. Interviews take place in locations that the young person would find comfortable and each session is built around them.

8.5 The project covers a number of issues within return home interviews:
   - They talk about safety strategies;
   - Levels of risk are assessed; and
   - They assess whether the child is running to or from something.

8.6 There is also capacity to provide one-to-one work to a further 100 young people with Haringey's share being approximately 40. This can either be as follow-on work from RHIs or can be referrals from other agencies or even self-referrals where there are concerns about the risk of going missing or where young people are not being reported missing. This involves up to 6 interviews being offered within 6 weeks. It was considered that there was only a small window of opportunity to intervene successfully so they have to respond quickly. If their involvement with children was for longer than this period, they could lose their capacity to move quickly. If children

are considered to be high risk, they are referred back to the First Response team.

8.7   External referrals to the service can be made although there is unlikely to be any specific need. There are a lot of children's residential homes within the borough although many do not deal specifically with Haringey children. However, the project only deals with Haringey children as otherwise they would not be able to cope with the demand. Children in the care of other authorities are referred back to them.

Outreach Work

8.8   The drop in centre aims to provide a safe space for young people and is based in Bromley Road, N17. The project also visits local authority residential homes in order to familiarise themselves with them and the children there and undertake targeted prevention work. This includes regular group work with children and staff as well as one-to-one sessions. The Panel noted that, in the case of children or young people from residential homes or foster care, there are normally more "push" factors behind why they have gone missing.

8.9   The project will also be undertaking preventative education at two schools within the borough – Woodside High and Hornsey School for Girls. As part of this, they will be visiting school assemblies and classes to give children information about the service, advising them of the risks involved in running away and of safe strategies.

8.10   The project deals with young people between the ages of 12 and 17. Most referrals are for 14 year olds. 46% of referrals had come from the N17 area which was why the safe space had been located there. It was noted that there were a large number of foster carers that lived in that area although neither of the Council run residential homes was based there. The service was surprised that such a high percentage came from one postal code. The precise reasons for this are unclear.

Return Home Interviews

8.11   Officers from the Project felt that it was important to establish why children were running away. If the young person was running to something or someone, it would be necessary to identify this and deal with it. If the child was running from something, work needed to be undertaken with the child.

8.12   The Panel noted that the project is only able to provide RHIs to a proportion of children who have gone missing. The project is funded by Aviva/Railway Children to deliver 75 one off RHIs for children per year across Islington, Haringey and, to a lesser extent, Camden. From this figure, the Project assumes that there is capacity to provide 30 of these within Haringey.

8.13   First time runaways or children already known to social care services are prioritised. The project had not selected these categories themselves as they were part of the working agreement with Haringey. Despite being prioritised, the project nevertheless sees a relatively low number of first timers. Serial absconders can be referred to the project that Barnardos has to address sexual exploitation for longer term work. If risk levels of children have not reduced sufficiently after six weeks, a discussion takes place with the Children and Young People's Service on what further action might be necessary.

8.14 The knowledge gained by the project will be reported back to Railway Children and Aviva on a quarterly basis. Haringey Council could also have access to this but only as a matter of courtesy. The project is providing an additional service to Haringey as the Council did not fund a return home interview process.

8.15 The Panel noted that it was accepted by the Council that the service was additional. There were procedures for dealing with missing children but how these were followed depended on the nature of the child. The Council had been explicit in determining who they wanted the service to focus on. There were limits to the capacity of services to deal with missing children. Who the current priorities missed was nevertheless of interest as was who was referred onwards for further action by the project.

8.16 The Panel is of the view that it is important that independent return home interviews are offered to *all* children that have gone missing and particularly first timers. There is clear evidence that it is best done by a third sector organisation, such as Barnardos, and the Panel very much welcomes the start of their work within Haringey.

8.17 The Panel was told that, where interviews are not undertaken by the Miss U project, they are instead offered by social workers and staff within residential homes, although there is no conclusive evidence either of who has been performing this role in the past or of how this information has been collated, analysed, reported or acted upon. The London procedures suggest that, whilst a social worker would be suitable to conduct such an interview, it should be someone other than the allocated social worker. Residential staff would also not be considered to be sufficiently independent due to their relationship to the child or young persons placement. In particular, the child or young person may have concerns about their placement that are behind them going missing.

8.18 The Panel feels that it is important that there is the necessary capacity to offer independent return home interviews to all relevant children on the basis outlined in the London procedures. It is difficult to quantify precisely any potential financial implications arising from this due to the range of arrangements that are viewed as suitable and the fact that the child or young person can decide who they wish to speak to. It would also be necessary to quantify the number of children and young people that are currently not being given a suitable opportunity to speak to someone and such information does not appear to be currently readily available. In addition, due to the work that services have been doing to ensure the correct recording of cases, there has also been some volatility in the number of children classified as missing which makes it difficult to estimate the potential number of children and young people involved. Nevertheless, the Panel is of the view that it may only require comparatively modest amounts of funding from the Council.

8.19 The Panel acknowledges that, with resources currently being severely limited, it could prove challenging to identify this. However, there is evidence that such measures can be cost effective if they prevent further instances of running away, which can prove expensive to services. There is also cost involved if social workers are undertaking interviews. For example, the Children's Society estimates that two hours of a social workers time costs £144. It would nevertheless also recommend that the cost effectiveness of this provision be subject to monitoring and evaluation.

Recommendation:
That action is taken to confirm that all children and young people who go missing from care and from home are offered an independent return home interview on the basis outlined in the pan London procedures with any shortfall identified met through the commissioning by C&YPS of additional capacity from an appropriate third sector organisation and that this be subject to regular monitoring and evaluation to ensure its cost effectiveness.

8.20 In addition, the Panel is also of the view that the same opportunities should be provided for Haringey children who are placed out of borough.

Recommendation:
That residential care providers be requested to confirm that arrangements are in place for all Haringey children who are placed out-of-borough and go missing to receive an independent interview.

8.21 The Panel is of the view that the information and intelligence gained through independent return home interviews should be collated and used to better inform interventions. As part of this, action should be taken to gain a greater understanding of the underlying reasons why children and young people go missing and, in particular, those who abscond from care.

Recommendation:
That C&YPS should seek to gain a greater understanding of the 'push' factors behind running away from Council care and seek to develop and deliver a strategy to address them.

Appendix A

Participants in the Review:

Debbie Haith - Deputy Director; Children & Families, C&YPS

Wendy Tomlinson – Head of Service; Commissioning and Placement, C&YPS

Sylvia Chew – Head of Service; First Response, C&YPS

Sergeant Paul Davies, Metropolitan Police Missing Persons Unit

Chris Emeruwa – Coppets Road Children's Home

Vivienne Osborne – Kindercare Fostering

Ntombi Kibutu   - Hillfields Children's Home

Sandra Russell   - Haringey Park Children's Home

Karen Thompson – Young Generation Children's Home

Remi Johnson – Xcel 2000 Foster Care Services

Urs Bielmann – Capstone Vision Foster Care

Tim McArdle – Capstone Vision Foster Care

Haringey Foster Care Association

Gloria Stott - Barnardos

Jodie Farmer – Barnardos

Becky Hug – The Children's Society

Geraldine Boyles – The Children's Society

Appendix B

Documents referred to:

London Procedure for Safeguarding Children Missing from Care and Home – London Child Protection Committee (March 2006)

Beyond Refuge; Supporting Young Runaways – NSPCC

Missing in London: Meeting the Needs of Young People who Run Away – Barnardo's Policy and Research Unit (August 2006)

A Report on the Young Runaways Situation in London for GoL – ECOTEC Research and Consulting (February 2010)

Children and Young People Missing from Home and Care – Report to Vulnerable Children Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Birmingham City Council (July 2011)

Missing from Care in Staffordshire; A Report prepared by Barnardo's for Staffordshire Children and Lifelong Learning Directorate – Di McNeish and Sara Scott

Missing from Care, Missing from Home Joint Protocol and Practice Guidance – Haringey LSCB

Still Running: Children on the Streets in the UK – Safe on the Streets Research Team (1999)

Make Runaways Safe; Launch Report – The Children's Society (July 2011)

Supporting Young People Who Run Away or Go Missing; A briefing for Lead Members for Children's Services – DCSF

Statutory Guidance on Children who Run Away and Go Missing for Home or Care; Supporting Local Authorities to Meet the Requirements of National Indicator 71 – Missing from Care and Home – DCSF (July 2009)

Young Runaways Action Plan – DCSF (June 2008)

Children Missing from Care: Good Practice in Residential Care – NCERCC

Young Runaways – Social Exclusion Unit (2002)