

Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **11 July 2014**

By: **Director of Children's Services**

Title of report: **Looked After Children (LAC) who go missing and who may be at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE)**

Purpose of report: **To update Corporate Parenting Panel on key data and progress in safeguarding Looked After Children who go missing and who may be at risk of CSE**

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**RECOMMENDATION:** The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report

**1. Financial appraisal**

1.1 There are no increased costs arising from this report.

**2. Supporting information**

2.1 The Looked After Children who go missing and who may be at risk of child sexual exploitation report is attached as appendix 1.

**3. Recommendation**

3.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report.

STUART GALLIMORE  
Director of Children's Services

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Local Members: All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: none



## **Looked After Children (LAC) who go missing and who may be at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE)**

1.1 In September 2009, a Joint Protocol for Children Missing in Sussex was agreed between Sussex Police and the three Sussex Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs). In January 2010, a minor amendment to the protocol was introduced with reference to different responses by the police to “missing” episodes and children who are “absent”. National definitions define “missing” as “young people not being where they should be and agencies do not know where they are,” and “absent” as “young people not being where they should be, but agencies know where they are.”

1.2 More recently in 2013 new Statutory Guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care was issued by the Department for Education (DfE). To meet the statutory guidance, priorities within East Sussex include the following:

- To identify a strategic lead responsibility for children or young people who run away or go missing.
- The LSCB needs to have in place systems to monitor prevalence of and the responses to children and young people who go missing.
- An updated Runaway and Missing from Home and Care Protocol (RMFHC Protocol) needs to be in place. This should be agreed with Sussex Police.
- LAC plans and child protection plans need to include a strategy about keeping the child safe including when the risk of CSE is identified. Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) should be kept informed about missing/absent episodes and should address these in statutory reviews.
- A new framework for out of area placements was issued by the DfE in January 2014. Agreement to all out of area placements is required to be given at a senior level. Agreement should be based on an assessment of need with a plan that includes a range of services in place to meet those needs. All statutory notifications to the ‘receiving’ local authority should take place.
- Brief Safe and Well checks should be undertaken by the Police when a child/young person is found after a missing episode. A formal return interview should then be undertaken. Following the Safe and Well check and a return interview, any information/intelligence that arises should be passed to the Police for analysis and action so that disruption of offenders or of people posing risk can take place.
- Under the new guidance, ESCC should ensure that Return Home Interviews (RHIs) are undertaken within 72 hours of the child/young person being located. They should happen in a neutral place and the child should be asked who they wish to speak to. The statutory guidance suggests that the person could be a social worker (other than the child’s social worker), an IRO an independent visitor, a teacher, a school nurse, a youth offending or youth worker, a voluntary sector practitioner, or a police officer whom the child knows and trusts.

1.3 Significant progress has been made between Sussex Police and East Sussex Children’s Services in reviewing the new statutory guidance. It is an expectation that IROs should ensure that LAC reviews address strategies for keeping the young person safe. Agreement has to be given by the Assistant Director for Safeguarding, LAC and SEN for all LAC who are placed with carers who live outside East Sussex. This ensures that the identified placement is able to meet the needs of the child and that there is a robust multi agency support plan in place. A new process for undertaking RHIs has been drafted

between Sussex Police and the Head of Service for LAC. This is to ensure that there is both consistency in practice and a comprehensive and robust system, so that no young person falls through the net. After a Safe and Well check has been completed, the Sussex Police Missing Person's Coordinator requests that Catch 22, a voluntary partner commissioned jointly by ESCC and Sussex Police, or another appropriate professional undertakes a RHI. The RHI summary is shared with the Missing Person's coordinator. Any reports of crime are reported to a nominated phone number at Sussex Police. Any intelligence is reported using an agreed intelligence pro-forma and submitted to a specific email address at Sussex Police. This new draft process for RHI's will need to be agreed at a strategic level by the LSCB. A joint commissioning arrangement for undertaking RHI's is also being considered across West Sussex and Brighton and Hove Children's Services.

1.4 Since January 2013 East Sussex Children's Services has implemented a new social care recording system for identifying all LAC who go missing or who are absent. This has produced a more accurate system for analysing episodes when children are missing. The system enables the department to interrogate the data in terms of timescales, gender, age, reason for missing episode, etc. In 2013-14 there were 25 LAC with missing episodes. Of these 25, 15 LAC were missing more than once. There were also 14 LAC who were 'absent'. Of these 14, 6 LAC were absent more than once. Of the 25 LAC who were missing, on 19 occasions they were missing for over 24 hours, 17 times they were missing for over 48 hours and 9 times they were missing for over 5 days. All these young people, apart from one young unaccompanied asylum seeker, were tracked actively by the Police and by our staff, found and up to date safety plans were put in place. The Police believe that the UASC who has been missing for many months has disappeared to the Continent. Of the 25 LAC who went missing, 14 were female and 11 male. 21 out of the 25 young people that went missing were aged 16 and above. Out of the total missing and absent episodes for LAC, 15 episodes recorded that the risk of sexual exploitation was a significant factor whilst they were missing/absent. We are confident that the higher numbers of episodes of both missing and absence for LAC as compared to previous years, is due to the introduction of the new recording system and improved reporting.

1.5 In addition to the internal recording system, all the residential homes use a comprehensive system of recording young people who are missing or absent. This includes recording duration and numbers of episodes. These statistics form part of the homes' quality assurance process and are reported to Ofsted on a 6 monthly basis in their Regulation 34 reports. There is a proactive approach within the homes: staff members go out in the evenings and night time to follow, search for, and collect any young people who are at significant risk; as well as regularly communicating with the Police. The LSCB manager has also visited a significant number of private children's homes in East Sussex in order to remind them of their statutory responsibilities in relation to children placed by other local authorities who go missing. LAC placed in East Sussex by other local authorities are also tracked at the fortnightly multi agency Missing and Risk of CSE group.

1.6 When LAC go missing, for many of them there is inevitably a close correlation with an increased risk of CSE. National awareness that CSE was becoming a more widespread issue was reported by the DfE in "Tackling CSE-Action Plan", which was published in November 2011. This has formed the basis for building a response to CSE in East Sussex and National Working Group members have acted as consultants in the development of our local planning. There is a Pan Sussex Strategy for CSE which has been agreed by East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton and Hove LSCB's.

1.7 In East Sussex, there is currently a multi-agency Missing and Risk of CSE Group. This meeting is chaired alternately by the LAC Operational Manager and Sussex Police's Missing Person's Coordinator. The purpose of this meeting is identification, tracking, sharing of information about all children/young people (those living at home as well as all LAC) who

go missing and are at risk of CSE. This is attended by a range of different agencies including the Police Missing Person's Coordinator), the Sex and Safety Service for You (SASSY) nurse, the LAC nurse, all 3 voluntary organisations working in ESCC on CSE/missing issues, ESCC Registered Homes Managers, representatives from the Behaviour and Attendance Service, and managers from the LAC and Youth Support teams. The frequency of this meeting has been recently reviewed. It is now held fortnightly (previously it was held monthly), alternating between the East and West of the county according to the home address for the young person. This increased frequency allows more time for discussion and risk management.

1.8 In October 2013, referral pathways were agreed with the three voluntary organisations (Catch 22, What Is Sexual Exploitation (WISE) from Sussex Central YMCA and Barnardos), working in East Sussex to help protect and support young people who are at risk of Sexual Exploitation. These pathways are used to make referrals to any of the three voluntary organisations once the immediate safety of the child has been considered via the child protection process. The referral pathways reinforced the expectation that normal child protection processes should apply for any child or young person who is at risk of significant harm due to sexual exploitation or sexual abuse. Currently, the three voluntary organisations are working with approximately 30 vulnerable young people including LAC and are providing consultation to a range of staff including to the residential homes and Lansdowne secure unit.

1.9 A small number of specialist agency placements external to East Sussex have been procured to respond to the complex needs of a small number of young women who have been victimised by offenders and often this has been after a period in secure accommodation.

1.10 The Police have also been successful in disrupting some networks who have targeted local children.

## 2. Summary.

2.1 The panel is asked to note the data and progress in relation to LAC who go missing and who may be at risk of CSE and to endorse the key priorities for Children's Services and East Sussex's LSCB.

- To finalise the process for undertaking Return Home Interviews with Sussex Police and Catch 22 and for this to be signed off by the strategic group of the LSCB.
- To consider a Pan Sussex re-commissioning arrangement for undertaking Return Home Interviews.
- To ensure that there is more accurate recording of all missing/absent episodes for looked after children.
- East Sussex LSCB to regularly review and analyse data on LAC who go missing or who are absent.
- East Sussex LSCB to review the ability of local partner agencies to be pro-active in respect of disruption and prosecution.

Teresa Lavelle-Hill  
25 June 2014