



**Report for:  
ACTION/INFORMATION**

**Item Number:**

**12**

<b>Contains Confidential or Exempt Information</b>	<b>NO</b> (If yes state which paragraph of the Access to Information Rules, the exemption relates)
<b>Title</b>	Report on Looked After Children (LAC) and Missing from care
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<b>Portfolio(s)</b>	Cllr Binda Rai Children and Young People.
<b>For Consideration By</b>	Corporate Parent Committee
<b>Date to be Considered</b>	March 19 <sup>th</sup> 2015
<b>Implementation Date if Not Called In</b>	
<b>Affected Wards</b>	All Wards
<b>Area Committees</b>	
<b>Keywords/Index</b>	LAC Missing CSE

**Purpose of Report:**

- a) To outline to members the number of Looked after Children (LAC) who have had reported missing episodes 2014/15
- b) To outline to members the reasons for these missing episodes.
- c) To outline to members the risks associated with children and young people who go missing and steps taken to safeguard young people from child sexual exploitation.
- d) To inform Members of the range of support and partner involvement to divert children who are LAC away from going missing and are at risk of sexual exploitation.
- e) To inform members about the key issues in safeguarding looked after children from sexual exploitation.

## **1. Recommendations**

- 1.1** Members are invited to note this report and identify any additional information they would like to receive.

## **2. Reason for Decision and Options Considered**

This report updates members on the number of young people who are LAC who have been reported missing from April 2014 to March 9<sup>th</sup> 2015.

## **3. Background**

### **3.1 Reasons Children and young people go missing**

**3.1.1** There are a variety of reasons that children who are looked after go missing from their placements. They may leave their placements in order to return to the care of a parent or family member. They may be unhappy in their placement or they may not be adhering to boundaries and choosing to spend time with friends.

**3.1.2** Further reasons may be significant safeguarding issues such as abuse within a placement, involvement in youth offending or because they are being groomed by adults for sexual exploitation.

**3.1.3** Whatever the reason for a child being missing from care there is always risk attached to a child or young person not being where they ought to be or with their identified carer.

**3.1.4** Many looked after children have pre-existing vulnerabilities to CSE prior to becoming looked after. The early experiences of harm, abuse/neglect separation and loss that bring the majority of children and young people into care increase their vulnerability to grooming and exploitation. Adults seeking to exploit LAC will be aware of this and will also know where to locate LAC. A combination of the grooming process, abuse of power/control and coercion that includes threats and actual violence makes it more difficult for children to disclose abuse and to engage in any safeguarding activity or investigation.

Children who are sexually exploited are more likely to go missing from their placement because the perpetrator will seek to isolate the child from their support structures and the influence of carers. This is will form part of the grooming process. Without exception all the children for whom there are concerns about CSE there are also concerns about going missing.

Dissatisfaction with decisions made in their lives such as coming into care or a change of placement may “push” children to go missing. CSE perpetrators will provide enticement or incentive for children to go missing; these can be understood as “ pull ” factors. Looked after children are likely to have limited capacity to identify the risk that perpetrators present. They will have limited or no choices over the abuse experience of abuse and harm.

### **3.2 Learning from recent inquiries and Serious Case Reviews**

**3.2.1** There are recurring themes and issues arising from the inquiries into CSE in Rochdale, Rotherham and the Oxford Serious Case Review published on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2015. They can be broadly understood as

- Lack of understanding of the concept of sexual exploitation
- Failing to understand the lack of decision making ability in developmentally immature, traumatised children.
- Failing to understand that children were threatened with violence to them and their families by the perpetrators and .that this prevents disclosure
- Failing to believe children or to be curious enough to pursue concerns.
- Absence of coordination and collaboration between services especially those with lead roles for safeguarding; Children’s Social Care and Police
- Poor strategic leadership
- Absence of political leadership
- Engagement of stakeholders including those from BME communities
- Over representation of looked after children as victims of CSE.

### **3.2 Risks associated with episodes of being missing form care**

**3.2.1** Every LAC child who goes missing will have a risk assessment completed by the allocated social worker. This enables the carers and police to assess the level of risk given the circumstances of each child.

**3.2.2** Return to Home interviews have traditionally been carried out by the allocated social worker for the child, however, the London Safeguarding Children Missing from Care, Home and Education Protocol state that these interviews should be undertaken by people who are not care planning for the child. As of 1st April 2015 those interviews will be conducted by members of the At Risk of Homelessness team (AROH) who will provide the necessary independence. .

**3.2.3.** There has been significant work on managing the risks of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) at an individual and a strategic level over the past 18 months including mandatory training of all social workers in CSE/Missing identification and intervention, revising pathway plan assessments to conduct a risk assessment of all LAC aged 16-18 every 6 months as part of the pathway plan reviews, alongside individual and complex multi-agency strategy meetings, that devise safety plans for the child but also consider intelligence received on perpetrators in a systematic way to disrupt and curtail the adult activity.

### **3.3 Revision of data capturing systems**

**3.3.1** The existing systems for capturing Missing from Care data have undergone a major review and the new episode has been launched in March 2015. Historically a greater emphasis was placed upon capturing missing episodes over 24 hours in duration. One of the features of CSE is that the young person/ child may not be missing for more than a few hours at a time but may be missing for repeated episodes.

**3.3.2** To improve the quality of data relating to all missing children including LAC, the electronic data base for CSC called Frameworki now has a new episode for recording incidents of a child going missing. This is significant for LAC as previously patterns of missing were recorded only if they were over 24 hours in length because this reflected statutory requirements. This did not accurately reflect that even for the shortest period missing LAC with additional vulnerabilities can be at risk. The Missing Children episode allows for regular reporting of data relating to Missing Children which allows staff to monitor trends, patterns and plan service delivery to reflect need.

### **3.4 Services and interventions available for children and young people missing and at risk of CSE**

**3.4.1** The London Safeguarding Children Missing from Care, Home and Education Protocol has been adopted by Ealing Council and local Ealing guidance has been written and issued to staff to support their understanding of the protocol. Both set out the required steps staff must take to prevent LAC going missing and responses required when a child is missing and after they are located.

**3.4.2** There is a programme of training in place for Children's Services staff as well as multi-agency partners in responding to Missing Children and to understand the implementation of the London Safeguarding Children Missing from Care, Home and Education protocol. Additional multi-agency training is

also in place for CSE which includes reference to the vulnerability of missing children and LAC.

**3.4.3** LAC who are missing and or at risk of CSE are required to be the subject of a multi-agency strategy meeting to plan for their immediate safety or location and return. In addition those children will be referred to the monthly meeting of the Multi- Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) Meeting. MASE is part of the Metropolitan Police Pan London CSE Protocol March 2015 which guides the Police in investigating CSE. This has been reviewed and updated this month, Ealing CSC contributed to the regional review. Since its inception in December 2013 Ealing MASE has considered a total of 65 victims and perpetrators of CSE. Whilst the majority are not LAC 15 victims discussed are or have been looked after. MASE also considers LAC placed by other Local Authorities within placements located in Ealing.

**3.4.4** The services in place for those at risk of repeated missing episodes and CSE are as follows

- **Placements:** Either a change of placement type or of geographical area or of both. Secure placements for children are a radical step which involves obtaining a Court Order to detain a young person for their own safety. This has been used with limited success historically with young people frequently returning to the perpetrators at the point of discharge from secure. There has been some success in keeping young people local with intensive support.
- **Specialist intervention:** Ealing currently uses Barnardos and Women and Girls Network (WAGN) to provide intensive 1:1 support to young people. Barnardos current work is time limited and in recognition of the need to have long term, open ended support a tendering process has recently been completed to identify a CSE support service that will be imbedded into Children's Social Care. In addition to providing support to children it will provide additional advice and consultation to staff. The Youth Offending Service also has an outreach worker available who is trained in Barnardos methodology.
- **LAC Psychology Service:** The tier 2 CAMHs Psychology Team is based within Children's Services and provides both consultations to social workers and carers and also 1:1 support for young people.
- **Vulnerable Adolescence Panel (VAP):** VAP is a senior level multi agency panel that meets every two months to consider multi agency

approaches to high risk situations for young people in Ealing. This includes discussion about LAC who are the most vulnerable; are missing and at risk of CSE or other forms of exploitation.

**3.4.5** There are no easy solutions to safeguarding children and young people going missing from placement and at risk of CSE because the process of grooming and victimisation present barriers to disclosing abuse and identify of perpetrators. Even once placed in a safe environment. We have had some success with keeping children local with high levels of intervention and some success in placing children at a distance from the local area, however, for some young people this just results in them being targeted in the new area they have moved to.

### **3.5 Ealing LAC Missing data**

From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 – 9<sup>th</sup> March 2015 there have been 90 Missing episodes recorded. This accounts for 24 young people going missing. There are 6 children with 5 or more episodes of missing recorded and 18 children with between 1-4 episodes of being missing.

There are 18 episodes recorded of over 24 hours.

Of these 18 episodes 3 were reported missing but staying with family members.

9 were assessed as high risk of CSE.

2 were at risk of Youth Offending

4 were staying out with friends

Of the 90 missing episodes, 5 were male and 13 were females.

The youngest child to go missing was aged 14 and is currently in a secure unit in order to safeguard her.

The majority of young people were aged between 16 and 17 years of age.

There have been no recorded incidences of children going missing because they have felt mistreated at their placement, though one young person who returned to his extended family did express unhappiness in his placement.

Children have access to advocacy via a voluntary sector service called Voice. Social Workers can also refer LAC to the Voice.

#### **4. Financial**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

#### **5. Legal**

Children Act 1989

Care Planning, Placement and Case review regulations 2010

#### **6. Value For Money**

The Brighter Futures innovation project currently being set up in Children's Services is seeking to keep children in the local area with an intensive multi agency package of support and a section of this cohort will be a part of this exciting new service. The Brighter Futures pilot project seeks to provide multi-agency services to children on the edge of care and looked after children with complex needs. This service will be available to a small group of LAC including those at risk of being missing and at risk of CSE. Alongside testing a different model of working and delivering interventions to ensure the children are safeguarded, the pilot will seek to move young people to local highly trained and supported fostering placements from residential units at a distance from Ealing. Service user involvement and mentoring will be part of the pilot.

#### **7. Risk Management**

There is a clear overlap in the vulnerability of girls and boys at risk of offending alongside Child Sexual Exploitation. Missing episodes are a risk factor in relation to gang activity, is a high priority area within Social Care, Youth Offending Services and the police. Intelligence and information sharing from within Police and YJS is invaluable in identifying children are risk of CSE. Key members of the Youth Justice Service are members of MASE including those with oversight of work with gangs. The inclusion of a Gangs SPOC in MASE was recommended by the Office of the Children's Children and implemented at the outset by Ealing.

#### **8. Community Safety**

## **9. Links to Strategic Objectives**

The work of the Looked after Children Teams and Safeguarding Service link to the Corporate Strategy. The Ealing Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy is in place to provide strategic direction. In addition the Ealing Safeguarding Children Board has a sub group devoted to CSE and the overlap with missing children. The CSE/Missing Children sub group has a strategic action plan in place arising from the Ealing CSE Strategy.

Targets to improve safeguarding are set within the wider objective of creating a great place for every child and young person to grow up.

## **10. Equalities and Community Cohesion**

Equality Impact is consistently reviewed and evaluated in terms of service delivery.

## **11. Staffing/Workforce and Accommodation implications:**

None

## **12. Property and Assets**

None

## **13. Any other implications:**

None

## **14. Consultation**

## **15. Timetable for Implementation**

## **16. Appendices**

## **17. Background Information**

**Consultation**

Name of consultee	Department	Date sent to consultee	Date response received from consultee	Comments appear in report para:
Internal  Marcella Phelan Judith Finlay				