

Report title	Missing Children and Young People in Care	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Beverley Momenabadi Children and Young People	
Wards affected	All wards	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families	
Originating service	Children and Young People in Care	
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Report has been considered by	Children's Social Care Leadership Team	22 December 2022
	Corporate Parenting Board	

Recommendations for action:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Receive the Missing Children and Young People in Care report.
2. Receive a further update regarding Children and Young people in Care Missing Performance in six months' time for review.

Recommendations for noting:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to note:

1. The challenges and actions identified to decrease missing episodes for all children and young people in care.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Corporate Parenting Board on the challenges and actions identified when reducing the number of missing episodes for all children and young people in care. The report will highlight the progress made to disrupt recurring missing episodes for young people.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 A previous paper was shared at Corporate Parenting Board in June 2021 analysing 12 audits of young people who were repeatedly missing from home and care. This prompted a working group and subsequent action plan with a focus on policy, process, practice issues and the need for a multiagency approach. This was actioned and completed.
- 2.2 In March 2022, 10 of the previous audits were revisited. We found nine of the 10 young people were no longer repeatedly missing. It was agreed that the audit would be completed on a regular basis to ensure young people are being safeguarded appropriately.

3.0 Progress

- 3.1 There have been 289 missing episodes for 42 Children and Young People in Care (CAYPIC) since 1 March 2022. 22 of those young people had three or more missing episodes. Of the 289 missing episodes, 87 interviews were declined by the young person. The 87 declined interviews were made up of 19 young people from the CAYPIC service and on further analysis we found the following:
 - 3.2 Of the 19 young people who declined Missing Return interviews, 11 of these had three or more missing episodes.
 - 3.3 Of all the missing episodes for CAYPIC, 61% had completed interviews, 57% were completed for those that had three or more missing episodes.
 - 3.4 Social work visits are not consistently completed for the most frequent young people when a missing return interview is declined. Some of these are out of City (OOC) and although an expectation is that they are visited after each episode of young people placed OOC who go missing three times a week, this is not always viable. However, contact at the very least via telephone / virtual should be taking place and this was evident.
 - 3.5 Through input from the Exploitation Hub co-ordination of support via Multi-Agency Child Exploitation panel (MACE), and an ongoing commitment to engage young people in Missing Return Interviews, 78% of those closed to MACE had a significant reduction in missing episodes following the MACE process thus highlighting the value of this co-ordinated approach.
 - 3.6 MACE meetings are regularly in place with effective use of screening tools. Since the launch of the Partnership Missing and Exploitation Hub at the end of February 2021 there

have been 174 young people and adults that met MACE threshold and had an initial MACE meeting. While the numbers at Significant and Serious Risk have increased over the last two years, 74% of those meeting threshold at the daily briefings are now closed due to reduced risk (the rest are still being supported). Of those that met threshold only 9% were recalled, evidencing that the majority (91%) of those supported via the MACE process have sustained outcomes.

- 3.7 There has also been a significant increase in reported Missing Episodes. Missing episodes for young people were increasing before the COVID pandemic in 2019 but saw a temporary decline during the first lockdown in 2020. They have then continued increasing since September 2020. The average number of missing episodes per month during 2019 was 40. During 2021, the average was 62 per month and so far, during 2022, the average has been 71 episodes per month.
- 3.8 In October 2022, an updated audit of four young people in care who had recent missing episodes was undertaken to ascertain the Local Authority's response. When completing these audits, there were several valuable learning points noted which will aid us in developing our practice in relation to missing young people.
- 3.9 Two young people had missing/return visits completed within timescales. When a child in care goes missing, a return home interview is undertaken within 72 hours by an independent person. Where a young person is placed 20 miles out of the City, the return interview will be undertaken by the Missing Returns Officer face to face where possible or using virtual means (Facetime / Skype / Teams or telephone). Only if a young person cannot be contacted / does not engage with this will they then be allocated to a social worker. The purpose is to ascertain the reasons for the child going missing and what they did during this time to ensure they are appropriately supported and safeguarded to prevent future missing episodes. This is also to ensure any exploitation is disrupted as well as to inform strategic disruption of any criminal activity and risks posed by adults.
- 3.10 Three young people are subject to MACE meetings. These meetings appear to be comprehensive and are addressing the issues however, unfortunately, it does not seem to be making a difference to young people's missing episodes. Three young people were assessed as feeling happy and safe in their placements. For the one young person who had left their placement of their own accord and was residing in a placement that we did not feel was appropriate, there were plans being put into place to find more appropriate accommodation.
- 3.11 For two young people, assessments were out of timescales and for the assessments that were within timescales they did not include and/or address exploitation concerns. Two young people had CAYPIC reviews which included tasks around exploitation and a discussion around what professionals were doing to disrupt the behaviour. The exploitation tool is being completed; however, it is not being reviewed and/or updated regularly. It would be good practice to update this tool regularly and/or when there is a significant change to ensure the young person's risk level has remained static and/or

improved. This tool can then be utilised when updating the young person's assessment of need and their care plan to ensure that all professionals are aware of the strategies in place to support the disruption of missing behaviours.

- 3.12 Only one young person had a risk assessment completed, a safety plan in relation to missing episodes/exploitation and a National Mechanism Referral completed. This has been discussed with team managers and will be discussed within social work supervision to ensure all young people who go missing have these documents on file.
- 3.13 There are daily exploitation meetings held within the Exploitation Hub, with the police attendance, to discuss young people who are assessed as high risk and how police can disrupt. There is also a process for out of City young people who go missing which includes social workers sending notifications to Exploitation Hub and Mash24 email now being sent to Exploitation Hub Manager, Sue Priest for information. This information is fed into daily exploitation briefings and as a direct result there has been an improvement in distinguishing the difference between missing episodes from those missing from curfew across the service.
- 3.14 MACE meetings are regularly in place with effective use of screening tools. There is evidence of effective direct work with young people and good understanding of risk and why a young person goes missing is evident on file, with clear safety plans in place. In all recent audits the child's voice is being heard – this is clear through regular direct work, child attending their reviews, regular conversations during home visits, etc.
- 3.15 There is an escalation process in place for Strategy Discussions which now include Locate Officers so that missing strategy discussions can be picked up quicker. A weekly email is also sent to the services by the Missing Returns Officer detailing all children and young people who are or have been missing that week.
- 3.16 The Safeguarding Service Manager has acknowledged the need for MACE meetings and minutes to be organised and added promptly. There has been funding agreed for an additional Missing Return Worker and MACE Chair.

4.0 Further areas of development

- 4.1 This review of our missing policy and practice alongside the audits of four young people has identified a number of strengths and areas for improvement. The areas for development include all our missing policies to be finalised and Quick Reference Guide for staff to be circulated, along with workshops delivered by Advanced Practitioners. The workshops will include the expectations around visits, direct work and effective safety plans on file. We are awaiting final approval and, once received, these will then be implemented City wide.
- 4.2 We will continue to promote all agencies to utilise and promote the Children Society Advocacy Service for young people who would prefer support with speaking to their social worker around issues associated with missing episodes.

- 4.3 The Council's Insight and Performance team have been requested to completed a bi-monthly report to evidence management oversight is on file for all repeated missing young people.
- 4.4 Team Managers have been requested to ensure that Care Plans are evidencing how all professionals involved should be supporting the disruption of missing episodes. Furthermore, that assessments and risk assessments are updated and revised whenever there has been a significant event within a young person's life.
- 4.5 Joint audits to be completed annually with the Exploitation Hub to review the response and support that is being provided. Managers need to ensure all their workers are aware of roles, responsibilities, expectations, actions to be undertaken and timescales as detailed within policy. The Team Manager from the Exploitation Hub will support managers should they require this.
- 4.6 There will be quarterly meetings between the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) and the exploitation team to ensure all relevant information is shared, enabling the IROs to monitor this via the CAYPIC reviews.
- 4.7 The Service Manager for the Safeguarding service is reviewing the format of the MACE meetings and minutes to strength the evidence of MACE safety planning.
- 4.8 There is a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) audit taking place to ensure all young people who need an NRM have one.
- 4.9 The Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together priority group meets regularly to review Wolverhampton's response to exploitation.
- 4.10 The 'problem profile' overview of exploitation in the City will be completed by April 2023, this will support and strengthen all the above recommendations.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 Overall, there has been progress in the disruption of repeated missing episodes This is largely linked to direct work from social care, focused intervention approach from the daily briefings, MACE meetings and collaborative working with agencies such as Power2, St Giles and the Police.
- 5.2 There is still some way to go to disrupt the activities linked to missing episodes, however plans are in place to support this. Further quality assurance will continue to support this area of work so that we can continue to improve outcomes for our young people who are missing from home and care and ultimately safeguard our young people.

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.
[JG/22122022/E]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 There are direct legal implications; our response to Missing Children and Young People is underpinned by Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care which can be accessed via; [Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/106222/sb22122022c.pdf)
[SB/22122022/C]

8.0 Equalities implications

- 8.1 There are no equalities implications associated with this report. Our policies and guidance ensure all CAYPIC receive an assessment of their needs and an appropriate care plan that meets children and young people's individual needs as a good parent would.

9.0 All other Implications

- 9.1 None