

CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 5
1 MARCH 2018	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Lou Williams: Service Director for Children and Safeguarding	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Sam Smith: Cabinet Member for Children’s Services	
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SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK AS A RESULT OF BEING MISSING FROM HOME, EDUCATION OR CARE

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S	
FROM: Service Director for Children and Safeguarding	Deadline date: N/A
<p>It is recommended that the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the activities by children’s services and our partner agencies in Peterborough to reduce the incidence of children and young people going missing and reducing associated risks of child sexual or criminal exploitation, and; 2. Note the proposed activities to improve information sharing between partner agencies by developing closer working relationships in this area between Peterborough City and Cambridgeshire County Councils. 	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

1.1 This report was requested by the Committee in order that Members are aware of activities being undertaken by partner agencies working together to help to safeguard children and young people who may be at increased risk of exploitation by others as a result of being missing from home, care or education.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

2.1 This report briefly summarises the ways in which agencies are working together in Peterborough to help to prevent young people becoming at risk of exploitation by others and to actively disrupt the activities of those seeking to exploit vulnerable young people. Young people who are regularly missing from home, care or education are particularly vulnerable to sexual and criminal exploitation. This is why it is a particular focus for agencies to work together to identify young people who are regularly missing in order that preventative action can be taken.

2.2 This report is for the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee to consider under its Terms of Reference Part 3, Section 4 - Overview and Scrutiny Functions, paragraph No. 2.1 Functions determined by Council :

- Children’s Services including
- a) Social Care of Children;
 - b) Safeguarding; and
 - c) Children’s Health

2.3 This report relates to the corporate priority to support vulnerable people.

- 2.4 This report relates to the pledge to ensure that we work together to keep children and young people safe.

3. **TIMESCALES**

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	N/A
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4. **BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES**

- 4.1. Young people who are regularly missing from home, care or education are at risk for a number of reasons. These include risk from sexual exploitation, from involvement in organised criminal activity, as well as being at increased risk of developing problematic alcohol and substance misuse behaviours.
- 4.2. The fact that young people who are regularly missing are at greater risk of sexual exploitation is now widely recognised. Peterborough was one of the first areas in the country where there was a successful joint police and children’s services investigations into the sexual exploitation of young people – Operational Earle - resulting in the conviction of a ten adult male offenders. Learning from this and other similar operations as well as from the experiences of young people who have been exploited in this way has led to significant changes in practice and increased awareness of the associated issues.
- 4.3. This does not mean that child sexual exploitation is no longer an issue, however, and all agencies working with children and young people must continue to be vigilant. Greater awareness of this form of exploitation among the local community, continued training and support being provided to those working with young people, and the willingness to discuss issues directly with young people through school and youth-based programmes are key factors in helping to prevent the circumstances where perpetrators of this type of abuse can exploit vulnerable young people.
- 4.4. A further form of exploitation to which young people are vulnerable is gaining increased national and regional attention. This is where young people are used to traffic drugs across county and regional boundaries on behalf of organised offenders, who are often based in urban areas long distances away. This form of exploitation of young people – known as County Lines – is the subject of increased scrutiny locally, and is also discussed in this report.
- 4.5. This report begins by considering indications of the numbers of young people who are at risk as a result of being missing from home, care or education, before discussing in some detail the arrangements in place locally for tackling child sexual exploitation and the developing local arrangements for ensuring that we are safeguarding young people from involvement in criminal exploitation.

Responding to young people who go missing

- 4.6. Young people may go missing from home, care or education for a number of reasons, and it is important to distinguish between behaviour that is in the normal range of adolescent behaviour – being away from home without permission but where the parent or carer is reasonably confident about where the young person’s location, for example – and behaviours that are of greater concern and that may indicate that a young person is at risk.
- 4.7. Support is offered to individual young people who go missing from home or care by way of an independent return interview. Barnardo’s is commissioned to undertake independent interviews where a young person has gone missing from home, while the National Youth Advisory Service undertakes interviews where young people in care have gone missing from their placement.
- 4.8. These independent interviews provide an opportunity for young people to express any worries or concerns they have to an adult independent of their home or care environment. In the event that

information is provided that might indicate particular risks to young people, this is shared with relevant agencies [children's social care and the police, primarily] so that action can be taken to safeguard the young person. More general information from these interviews is collated and contributes to intelligence that is shared between agencies at a multi-agency Missing and CSE Operational Group, which is held monthly.

- 4.9. A multi-agency protocol setting out the responsibilities of individual agencies in their work with young people who go missing has been developed by the Local Safeguarding Children Board. This helps practitioners to identify the most appropriate response when a young person goes missing, as well as identifying groups of young people who are most vulnerable because, for example, they have additional needs. The protocol also describes the circumstances when strategy discussions should take place between the police, children's social care and any other relevant partners to share information, explore risks in more detail and begin the development of plans to be put in place to help to safeguard the young person concerned.
- 4.10. Where children and young people are open to Children's Social Care or are looked after and go missing, a risk assessment is undertaken by the allocated social worker which is used to inform the child or young person's plan. For children in care or who are subject to child protection plans, independent chairs monitor progress against plans and the extent of risks at child protection conferences or statutory reviews in order to ensure that plans to reduce risks are effective.
- 4.11. Use of child sexual exploitation and missing risk assessments is monitored through our Quality Assurance service. The most recent audit of case records where people had been identified as being at risk of child sexual exploitation was carried out in March 2017. This found that the use of appropriate assessment tools was embedded across children's social care, with good quality assessments and evidence of good management oversight – this represented good progress against earlier audits of practice in this area. The next audit of practice in this area is due to take place in April 2018.
- 4.12. An audit of the approach to managing risk where young people go missing that was undertaken in November 2017 found less consistently good practice, however. The audit identified that not all young people who had gone missing from care had been offered return interviews, and that use of risk assessments and the level of management oversight was also less consistent. Actions are being taken to improve practice in this area. It is worth noting that there had been some turnover of team managers and social workers in this part of the service at the time of this audit, which is likely to have contributed to some of the issues identified.
- 4.13. Some children and young people at risk of child sexual exploitation do not go missing regularly from home or care but instead may have a pattern of being absent from school regularly for parts of the school day. All schools in Peterborough have a lead teacher responsible for ensuring that issues of potential child sexual exploitation among pupils in the school are identified. These leads have all received additional training and support to help identify signs and symptoms that a young person is potentially being exploited. Ordinarily, concerns about specific young people are raised through a referral to children's social care.

Numbers of young people who go missing in Peterborough

- 4.14. The great majority of children and young people who go missing are aged 13 and above. Incidents of missing are more frequent in the spring and summer, and less frequent in the winter.
- 4.15. The table below shows the number of missing incidents in 2016-17 and the year to date, indicating a slight decline in number of missing episodes in the current financial year compared to 2016/17:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	YTD
2017/18:	35	44	49	60	22	44	47	41	31				373
2016/17:	39	68	49	61	36	66	66	53	45	39	31	60	613

- 4.16. Children and young people who go missing may do so more than once. The table above is the number of missing episodes, while the table below shows the number of individual children and young people who have gone missing in each month:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	YTD
2017/18:	30	37	40	41	22	32	36	33	29				300
2016/17:	29	53	34	44	26	41	36	34	32	28	19	41	417

- 4.17. This means that in December 2017 for example, 29 individual children and young people went missing on a total of 31 occasions.
- 4.18. In most cases, a young person goes missing on only one occasion, with fewer being reported missing on three or more occasions:

	1 incident	2 incidents	3 incidents	4 + incidents	Individuals
2017/18:	248	35	14	3	300
2016/17:	314	60	21	22	417

- 4.19. The data indicates that in the current financial year, it is likely that for the year as a whole there will be fewer young people going missing more than once than was the case in 2016/17.
- 4.20. In the great majority of instances, children and young people are missing for less than 24 hours, as illustrated in the table below:

	16/17	17/18	16/17	17/18	16/17	17/18	16/17	17/18
	<24 hours		1 day		2 days		3 + days	
Apr	24	24	11	1	3	1	1	9
May	45	29	13	9	5	1	5	5
June	23	36	15	2	2	0	9	11
July	32	43	17	7	4	3	8	7
Aug	14	16	14	1	2	2	6	3
Sept	54	35	7	3	0	2	5	4
Oct	45	36	12	3	2	5	7	3
Nov	33	25	11	4	0	5	9	7
Dec	24	22	5	1	4	3	12	5
Jan	29		1		5		4	
Feb	24		4		0		3	
Mar	42		4		6		8	

- 4.21. Children and young people going missing and particularly those who go missing more regularly are much more likely to have some involvement with children's social care. Children and young people in care are over-represented in missing figures generally. This is for a number of reasons; some will be missing from placement because they have returned to parents/family without permission, while for others, their previous experiences of parenting include inconsistent boundaries and a contributing factor to them becoming looked after is that they have developed patterns of challenging behaviour, making it more likely that they will also go missing from a care placement.
- 4.22. In the current financial year, of the 300 children and young people who have gone missing to date, 175 were open to children's social care at the time they went missing, and a further 34 became open to children's social after having been missing, while only 49 have had no involvement with children's social care:

	2017/18:	2017/18:	2016/17:	2016/17:
Current:	175	58%	264	63%
Prior:	42	14%	50	12%
Subsequent:	34	11%	46	11%
Never:	49	16%	57	14%
Total:	300	100%	417	100%

- 4.23. Of the children and young people open to children's social care at the time of the missing incident, the majority were young people being missing from their care placement:

Open to CSC at the time (175):

	2017/18:	2017/18:	2016/17:	2016/17:
Current CLA	105	60%	141	53%
Current CP	7	4%	4	2%
Current CIN:	63	36%	119	45%
Total:	175	100%	264	100%

- 4.24. Children and young people reported missing from care are monitored closely. Most return to their placement within a few hours but for any who are missing for longer, there are clear escalation processes in place so that senior managers are able to ensure that effective action is taken to assess the level of risk and the appropriate response.

Identifying young people at risk from CSE and actions taken to safeguard them

- 4.25. Considerable work has taken place across the City to prevent young people from becoming at risk from child sexual exploitation. The Local Safeguarding Children Board has taken the lead role in this area and has been active in raising awareness of child sexual exploitation generally in the community, as well as in providing training and other support to key partner agencies.
- 4.26. Those working directly with young people are provided with specialist training through the safeguarding children board and elsewhere. Schools are often on the front line where recognition of young people potentially at risk of exploitation is concerned, and all schools therefore have designated leads on child sexual exploitation.
- 4.27. In addition to the continuing focus on prevention, key partner agencies work together to share information about young people who may be at risk of exploitation as well as intelligence about adults who have been identified as posing a risk to young people. The aim is to develop effective safeguarding plans in relation to the young people while disrupting the activities of potential offenders as far as is possible.
- 4.28. Where individual young people are identified as being at particularly high risk, they are discussed at the Missing and CSE Operational Group. Risk factors include the presence of additional factors that may indicate risk from child sexual exploitation, or that are related to the number of missing incidents, their duration or the age of the young person.
- 4.29. This group meets monthly and is chaired by the Head of Service for the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. The group is a multi-agency one, with regular attendance from agencies including:
- The police, including safer schools officers as well as public protection;
 - Children's social care;
 - Education safeguarding lead [as communication lead to and from schools];
 - Children missing education officer;
 - Barnardo's and National Youth Advisory Service;
 - The NSPCC

- The Youth Offending Service;
 - Peterborough Regional College
 - Youth in Localities Team;
 - Early Help services;
 - Health
- 4.30. The meeting operates on a number of levels. It enables information and intelligence about potential high risk perpetrators and links to any known addresses to be shared and links to be drawn with known patterns of young people being missing as gathered from return home interviews and in-depth knowledge of specific young people at particularly high risk.
- 4.31. The meeting also enables communication and knowledge to be shared about young people who may be becoming involved in offending behaviour during periods of being missing, and again to share any information about adults who may be exploiting them in this area, including in relation to the operation of County Lines as described in more detail below.
- 4.32. Finally, as noted above, the panel considers individual young people considered to be at particularly high risk as a result of being missing, of becoming involved in offending behaviour, or being at significant risk of sexual exploitation.
- 4.33. For individual young people, the meeting is able to develop multi-agency safeguarding plans, drawing on the information about the individual young person and the resources available from each of the agencies in attendance. Depending on the needs identified, actions taken may include a variety of interventions from the preventative services associated with the Youth Offending Service, for example, to engagement of more specialist help and support.
- 4.34. There are good links between the Children Missing Education services, Early help Services and the more specialist services represented at these meetings. This has enabled some targeted prevention approaches to be deployed through working with schools through early help services. The meeting has also enabled the coordination of a range of disruption activities including, for example, where intelligence has identified certain properties being used by young people gathering to drink alcohol, through the use of warning notices.
- 4.35. Of course it is not always possible to safeguard young people through preventative measures alone. Most parents are naturally very concerned when their child goes missing, and particularly when they go missing regularly. Plans to protect and safeguard young people are always drawn up in partnership with families. There are, however, some situations where it is difficult to safeguard young people while they remain with their families. This may be because relationships have broken down, or it may be the result of the young person being drawn into an apparently exciting peer group and that this superficial attraction together with usual adolescent rebellion and tendency towards risk taking behaviour has made it impossible for parents to maintain usual boundaries with their child.
- 4.36. In such circumstances, a care placement may be required. Where this is the case, the plan will usually be to work with the family in order to enable the young person to return home as quickly as possible. Time limited periods away from home can allow families the space to allow strained relationships to repair. Work can be undertaken with the young person and their family in order to help re-establish appropriate boundaries.
- 4.37. As at the end of January 2018, 15 young people open to Children's Social Care were assessed as being at risk from child sexual exploitation. This is a smaller number than was the at the time this issue was last reported to Committee in November 2016, when there were 35 young people identified as being at risk of child sexual exploitation open to the service. While this may indicate a reduction in overall risks, it is more likely to be a reflection of better quality assessments that have a clearer focus on actual risks facing individual young people than was previously the case.

County lines and criminal exploitation

- 4.38. County lines is a national issue and involves the use of mobile phones and train lines by organised gangs to expand their operations supplying drugs to new areas outside of their home location. According to the National Crime Agency, these activities almost always include the exploitation of vulnerable young people or adults, many of whom are unaware that they are being exploited – at least initially.
- 4.39. The Metropolitan Police has evidence of these county lines operating across the country, including through Peterborough and Cambridgeshire. Many of the young people being used to transport and supply drugs, weapons, money and other paraphernalia associated with this illegal activity believe that they are in control of their situation. This makes identifying and safeguarding young people involved in the activities particularly challenging.
- 4.40. Young people being exploited in this way are often exposed to a combination of push and pull factors, as well as to threats of violence and coercion. Pull factors include a sense that they are gaining status, money, drugs and so on themselves. A common approach used by those exploiting them is to supply class B drugs such as cannabis as a hook to secure deeper involvement. Push factors may include difficulties at home such as where a young person's needs are being severely neglected or where there is serious family conflict. Once young people have become involved in the activities associated with county lines, they are at risk of violence should they seek to move away from the activities or associates. They are also expected to take full responsibility for the legal consequences of being found in possession of drugs or weapons, with threats to themselves, their family or friends being used to secure compliance.
- 4.41. Peterborough and Cambridgeshire jointly hosted a regional event in November 2017 that brought together key agencies as a starting point for developing a coordinated response to tackling this issue. A multi-agency criminal exploitation strategy is now in the process of being developed, and aligned with the arrangements for tackling child sexual exploitation as described above.
- 4.42. Following on from the development of the multi-agency strategy, a range of awareness raising and training events will follow. These will focus on training for staff working in environments where young people are most likely to be at greatest risk, including pupil referral units and residential children's homes in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire. A more general awareness raising programme focused towards young people and schools will also take place.
- 4.43. Similar to the approaches used to tackle child sexual exploitation, there is a growing focus on the use of intelligence surrounding known county lines activities, focusing on perpetrators and the movements of vulnerable young people. Police are committed to prosecuting perpetrators using modern slavery and trafficking legislation and to viewing young people involved in county lines activities as victims of offences rather than perpetrators wherever they can.
- 4.44. Our Youth Offending Service is able to offer specialist support to young people who have become involved in serious crime through this form of exploitation. This service is also able to offer support to other agencies working with young people, helping to identify young people who are at risk of becoming involved and supporting them to intervene in order to prevent this from happening.

Likely future developments

- 4.45. While not all children and young people who go missing are also at risk of being exploited by others, there are clear overlaps and therefore benefits to bringing as many information streams together as possible.
- 4.46. While the motivations of perpetrators and the experiences of young people are very different, there is considerable similarity in the approaches required to prevent and tackle child sexual exploitation and the criminal exploitation of young people through involvement in county lines and similar activities.

- 4.47. Many of the partner agencies working together to identify vulnerable young people and target perpetrators work across both Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, while many of the actions that need to be taken need to be completed in both authorities and often regionally and beyond.
- 4.48. Members will be aware that Peterborough and Cambridgeshire are now sharing our 'front door' to both children's social care and early help services through joint Multi-Agency Safeguarding and Early Help Hubs. This is the route through which much of the initial information about vulnerable young people is shared, and it makes sense to continue to explore ways of developing closer working arrangements in safeguarding young people at risk from all forms of exploitation.
- 4.49. At present, separate meetings are held to consider risks to vulnerable young people in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire, despite many partner agencies being the same in each authority, with information being shared about the same locations and suspected perpetrators. As part of the approach to develop a multi-agency response to the issue of County Lines, we are therefore also taking the opportunity to review broader arrangements for ensuring the effective safeguarding of young people who are vulnerable exploitation through being regularly missing. This includes the way in which we gather information from interviews when young people return to home or care following a missing episode.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1. Senior officers within Peterborough City Council have contributed to this report, along with legal and finance colleagues.

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

- 6.1. By working closely together, agencies in Peterborough are identifying young people at risk of exploitation and are taking action to help safeguard them. These actions include identifying perpetrators seeking to exploit young people and taking robust enforcement action wherever possible, while ensuring that young people at risk and their families are provided with the support that they need.
- 6.2. Much has been learned from joint investigations into child sexual exploitation locally and nationally, and awareness of this form of criminal activity, including how to identify young people who may be at risk, has increased greatly over the last few years. Preventing and tackling child sexual exploitation will always remain a priority for local agencies, with an on-going training and awareness raising programme led by the Local Safeguarding Children Board.
- 6.3. A number of the lessons learned in tackling child sexual exploitation are also relevant to addressing the growing issue of young people being identified nationally as well as regionally as at risk of criminal exploitation. Awareness raising, dedicated training and support for those working with young people, as well as direct discussion with young people about the motives and risks posed by the perpetrators are all important elements of a successful prevention strategy.
- 6.4. Sharing intelligence and information about suspected perpetrators and comparing this with information about vulnerable young people who are regularly missing, combined with a determination to prosecute those guilty of exploiting young people are important factors in helping to reduce the likelihood of young people being exploited.

7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1. Members have important roles as corporate parents in scrutinising the quality of services delivered by key areas of the Council and partner agencies. This report is intended to assist Members in gaining an overview of actions being taken to safeguard children and young people who are vulnerable to exploitation and/or poor outcomes as a result of being regularly missing from care, home or education.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 8.1. A key element in safeguarding young people from sexual or criminal exploitation is the identification of those most likely to be at risk. This means that it is important that we have good processes in place for identifying when children and young people are regularly missing, as this will be the group most vulnerable to these forms of exploitation.
- 8.2. Multi-agency approaches to preventing and tackling the exploitation of young people have been demonstrated as the only effective way of addressing this form of abuse.

9. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 9.1. There are no specific financial implications arising from this report

Legal Implications

- 9.2. There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

Equalities Implications

- 9.3. There are no specific equalities implications arising from this report.

Rural Implications

- 9.4. There are no specific rural implications arising from this report.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 10.1. None

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1. None.

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