CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 8
14 MARCH 2019	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:		Lou Williams, Service Director, Children and Safeguarding	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:		Councillor 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, Children and Safeguarding	**Deadline date:** *N/A*

It is recommended that the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee:

1. Note the activities by children's and community services as well as our partner agencies 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 new arrangements to improve information sharing between partner agencies by developing closer working relationships in this area between Peterborough City and Cambridgeshire County Councils, and;
3. Note the role of the new Targeted Youth Support Service in working with vulnerable young people at risk from exploitation.

1. **ORIGIN OF REPORT**

1.1   This report was requested by the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee.

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 priorities relating to the safeguarding of vulnerable people.

2.4   This report directly relates to the children in care pledge as it is includes actions that children's services and key partner agencies take in order to safeguard children and young people in care who may be at additional risk in the event that they go missing from their care placement.

3.   TIMESCALES

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	**NO**	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	N/A

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 being at risk of 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.   Practice and understanding of the issues in this area is developing quickly. The first area to be identified was was in relation to Child Sexual Exploitation, or CSE. A number of high profile prosecutions of adults who have groomed and sexually exploited mostly young women have taken place in recent years, with one of the first successful prosecutions taking place in Peterborough in 2014/15 following a joint operation between police and children's services.

4.3.   More recently, it has been increasingly recognised that vulnerable young people who regularly are missing from home, care or education, also face an increased risk from a variety of other forms of exploitation including by peers, older young people and adults who seek to involve them in criminal activity or in developing extremist beliefs. Often, where peers are seeking to involve young people in exploitation, they themselves are being exploited by older young people or adults.

4.4.   The supply of illegal drugs from gangs in large urban areas to provincial towns and cities is an increasingly acknowledged issue. Known as County Lines, young people are groomed by gangs into transporting and supplying drugs by the promise of financial reward and the supply of drugs for their own personal use. Young people in this situation often do not recognise that they are being exploited; they sometimes have access to significant amounts of money and often feel a sense of power and self-assurance.

4.5.   They are nevertheless at significant risk of harm, however. They are, for example, vulnerable to attack by other criminal gangs into whose areas they are bringing drugs. The gang that they are supplying drugs for will often seek to ensure that they are not able to leave the gang without consequences. Young people in this position may also find that they have been encouraged to run up financial debts with their gang, which they can only pay off by continuing to act on their behalf.

4.6.   Gangs of this type are becoming increasingly sophisticated in the way that they track the young people working for them. We are aware, for example, of situations where young people have been supported to attend appointments with youth offending services that are a requirement of sentence following conviction. This is to ensure that they do not breach their order and risk a custodial sentence, which would result in them no longer being available to the gang for continued running and supply of drugs.

4.7.   The police and other agencies increasingly recognise young people involved in these activities as being victims and act accordingly. This is difficult, however, where young people do not see themselves in this way, or are by the time of arrest, justified in being very frightened of consequences to themselves or other family members in cooperating with any police enquiries.

4.8.   The practice and response to young people who face risks from outside their family homes is an area that has challenged safeguarding services, which have traditionally focused on family interventions and relationship building with young people as the main focus of intervention.

Effective interventions in this area are increasingly framed around a model of practice known as Contextual Safeguarding. This model and other approaches to safeguarding young people at risk as a result of going missing from home, care or education is discussed in more detail later in this report. It is helpful, however, to begin by analysing key available data about young people who go missing from home, care and education in Peterborough.

Responding to young people who go missing

4.9.   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.

4.10.   Peterborough and Cambridgeshire children's services are now working very much more closely together in this area, as part of our shared Integrated Front Door, based at Godmanchester. This shared service includes a joint Missing, Exploited and Trafficked [MET] Hub, which was originally developed in Cambridgeshire and was and continues to be a very effective approach. Indeed, the recent Ofsted inspection in Cambridgeshire singled out the MET Hub for praise in the way that it helps to safeguard vulnerable young people who go missing.

4.11.   Workers from the MET Hub ensure that children and young people who go missing are offered a return interview. This provides young people with an opportunity to discuss information of concern to them with an independent person, which they may not feel comfortable in sharing with parents or, for children and young people in care, their carers. Information gathered is used to build a picture of any patterns that may be emerging in relation to young people going missing. Such information might include commonalities such as areas where adults or older young people focus their attention on grooming young people to become involved in County Lines or other criminal activities, on addresses or areas where numbers of young people who have gone missing may be congregating and vulnerable to, for example, sexual exploitation, and the identities of any adults who may be of interest to police. This intelligence is then used to disrupt such activities.

4.12.   Young people may also provide information that is specific to their own circumstances. Where appropriate, this information is fed back to those working with them – their social worker if they are in care, or the Targeted Youth Support Service, or TYSS if they are a vulnerable young person in the community – and is then used to inform plans for them in order to improve individual safeguarding arrangements.

4.13.   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.

4.14.   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.

4.15.   The use and quality of child sexual exploitation and missing risk assessments is monitored through our Quality Assurance service. In the recent Ofsted inspection, inspectors noted that 'Responses to children who go missing or who are at risk of exploitation are timely and they are closely tracked by a lead manager and missing coordinator. When risks escalate, strategy meetings are held, with appropriate professionals in attendance.' Ofsted did, however, identify

that we need to do more to improve the use and quality of specialist risk assessments. A head of service is leading on improving practice in this area, and the impact of this is being monitored through the action plan following the Ofsted inspection.

4.16. Some children and young people at risk of exploitation may 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 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 going missing in Peterborough

4.17. 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.

4.18. The table below shows the number of missing incidents in 2017/18 and the year to date. This is showing us that there appears to have been a slight increase in the number of recorded missing episodes in the year to date compared with last year. At the end of quarter 3 in 2017/18, there had been 426 recorded missing episodes compared with 482 in the same period this year:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	YTD
2018/19:	69	56	58	51	49	50	50	52	47				482
2017/18:	41	49	59	75	29	45	50	46	32	48	27	68	569

4.19. Some children who go missing do so on more than one occasion. While the table above illustrates the number of missing episodes, the table below shows how many individual children have been reported missing in each month. So, for example, in November 2018, 38 children and young people were reported missing for a total of 46 missing episodes:

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	YTD
2018/19:	46	41	38	41	27	33	40	32	33				331
2017/18:	32	39	50	48	27	34	38	38	30	34	17	48	435

4.20. This measure is suggesting that the number of children going missing in the last two years has remained stable. In the first nine months of 2017/18, 336 individuals had been reported missing on at least one occasion, compared with 331 in the first nine months of the current financial year. Taking the two tables together, there has been no overall increase in the numbers of children and young people going missing over the last two years, but some have been missing on more occasions in the current year to date than in the same period of 2017/18.

4.21. In the great majority of instances, children and young people are missing for less than 24 hours, as illustrated in the table below:

	18/19	17/18	18/19	17/18	18/19	17/18	18/19	17/18
	<24 hours		1 day		2 days		3 + days	
Apr	53	22	6	9	3	2	7	8
May	46	27	0	16	2	3	8	3
June	46	32	3	13	4	3	5	11
July	35	42	8	22	2	4	6	7
Aug	35	17	3	7	2	2	9	3
Sept	44	29	3	8	1	5	2	3
Oct	36	27	4	15	2	5	8	3
Nov	40	19	5	10	3	10	4	7
Dec	31	20	5	4	3	3	8	5
Jan		28		12		3		5
Feb		21		5		0		1
Mar		42		12		8		6

4.22.   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.

4.23.   In the current financial year, of the 331 children and young people who have gone missing to date, 114 were open to children's social care at the time they went missing, 17 had previously been open to children's social care, while a further 39 became open to children's social after having been missing, while only 44 have had no involvement with children's social care:

	2018/19	2018/19	2017/18	2017/18
Current:	114	53%	116	44%
Prior:	17	8%	32	12%
Subsequent:	39	18%	75	28%
Never:	44	21%	41	16%
Total:	214	100%	264	100%

4.24.   A significant proportion of those open to children's social care and who go missing are children and young people who have gone missing from care:

	2018/19	2018/19	2017/18	2017/18
Current CLA	54	47%	64	55%
Current CP	6	5%	5	4%
Current CIN:	54	47%	47	41%
Total:	114	100%	116	100%

4.25.   Of the 214 children and young people open to children's social care at the time of going missing, subsequently or previously, the majority were missing on one occasion only:

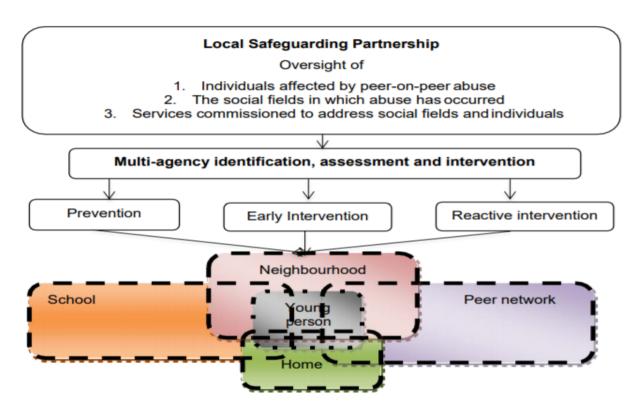|	1 incident	2 incidents	3 incidents	4 + incidents	Individuals
2018/19:	147	30	10	27	214
2017/18:	174	38	13	39	264

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

4.26. The learning from earlier strategies and approaches for safeguarding young people from sexual exploitation has been drawn upon when looking at how best to tackle other forms of exploitation of young people by peers, older young people and adults. While different in impact for and the general characteristics of young people targeted, there are a number of similarities in the way that vulnerable young people are targeted for exploitation. They are often groomed, for example, made to feel as though they are in control of the situation and are acting out of choice – at least initially – and offered financial or other forms of reward.

4.27. As noted in the introduction to this report, there have also been significant changes in our understanding of how to address and reduce the risks of harm faced by young people when those risks are from outside of the home. This has presented challenges to agencies, which have traditionally focused their safeguarding approaches on direct family intervention. Making a young person who is regularly going missing and is suspected of being involved in, for example, County Lines or sexual exploitation, subject to a child protection plan is unlikely to be effective when the home circumstances are only a small part and perhaps have no part to play in the risks facing the young person. Such approaches can also alienate parents who are wanting to do all they can to protect their child and are struggling to do so.

4.28. Recognition of the limitations of more traditional approaches has resulted in the development of models including 'Contextual Safeguarding', with the University of Bedfordshire playing a leading role in this area. Contextual safeguarding seeks to support partners [i.e. not just children's services] to assess the likely level of risks to young people from risk factors outside of the home, such as peer on peer abuse, to take action as appropriate to reduce these risks, and in turn reduce the likelihood that the circumstances which may lead to exploitation of young people in the community are present. The model also applies in developing individual safety plans for young people who are at risk of or who are being exploited. The University of Bedfordshire has published a helpful overview of the research, which can be found at Appendix 1 to this report.

4.29. The model is informed by the understanding that as we move from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood, less time is spent socialising with our families. During adolescence, the nature of a young person's school and neighbourhood and the peer relationships they form within these settings are important in informing the extent to which they encounter protection or abuse. The model is summarised by the University of Bedfordshire in the following terms:

> Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships. Therefore children's social care practitioners need to engage with individuals and sectors who do have influence over/within extra-familial contexts, and recognise that assessment of, and intervention with, these spaces are a critical part of safeguarding practices. Contextual Safeguarding, therefore, expands the objectives of child protection systems in recognition that young people are vulnerable to abuse in a range of social contexts.

4.30. The approach recognises that young people's experiences outside of the home can inform and be informed by what is happening at home. Young people who have experienced domestic abuse at home, for example, may learn harmful social norms that affect their relationships with peers. Equally, young people experiencing exploitation within their peer groups may lead to a fracturing of relationships at home, as parents and carers struggle to understand what is affecting their child.

4.31.   The approach is therefore based on understanding the influence of the various factors that affect young people and offering them protection or place them at risk of harm, recognising that very often, the impact of interventions focused on individual families or young people will be limited.

4.32.   Local partners are increasingly adopting an approach that takes account of research of this nature. As noted above, police use information gathered from return interviews in order to disrupt the activities of those who are seeking to exploit young people. This may involve, for example, focused activities in an area of fast food shops, where young people hanging out in the area have been targeted by those seeking to groom them and exploit them.

4.33.   The University of Bedfordshire research summarises this approach in the following diagram:

4.34.   This thinking also influenced the development of the Targeted Youth Support Service, or TYSS, in Peterborough. The TYSS works with young people who are open to the Youth Offending Service and on the edge of care, as well as those who are at risk of exploitation.

4.35.   The service is based within the Communities area of the People and Communities directorate. This is in order that the service can make best use of links with community safety and housing services. The team incorporates the Youth Offending Service, a dedicated youth and family team and a community's team. The service has very close links to children's social care, including the Missing Exploited and Trafficked hub as described above, as well as to Youth Offending Services.

4.36.   This multidisciplinary approach that includes young people's workers and youth and family workers who support young people to be in education, employment and training, and social workers able to assess and manage risk, has been established because more traditional social work services often struggle to engage and support this group of vulnerable and hard to reach young people.

4.37.   The service was launched in September 2018, and as well as improving the safeguarding of vulnerable young people from the risk of exploitation, and reducing the numbers of young people coming into the criminal justice system is also expected to help in reducing the number of young people coming into the care system in an unplanned way. **Further details about the TYSS are included in a separate report Appendix 1 - The Contextual Safeguarding Briefing.**

5.   CONSULTATION

5.1   Consultation has taken place with key officers and key partner service areas including business information services for performance data.

6.   ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

6.1   This report outlines the wide range of services and interventions by the children's and community services as well as by our key partner agencies to safeguard children and young people who are vulnerable as a result of being missing from home, education and care.

6.2   The new Targeted Youth Support Service is now fully operational, and is expected to improve the service offered to young people who are vulnerable for a variety of reasons through its multidisciplinary approach.

7.   REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

7.1   Information sharing and partnership working is critical in supporting and safeguarding young people who are at risk because they are regularly missing from home, education or care. Working across Peterborough and Cambridgeshire through the Missing, Exploited and Trafficked Hub, which is part of the shared Integrated Front Door supports joint working in this area with the police as well as other key partners.

7.2   The new Targeted Youth Support Service has been developed in order to bring key services and disciplines together, improving our ability to safeguard vulnerable young people.

8.   ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

8.1   There are no applicable alternative options available

9.   IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

9.1   There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Successful prevention of young people coming into care represents good financial investment.

Legal Implications

9.2   There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Equalities Implications

9.3   There are no direct implications for equalities issues arising from this report.

Rural Implications

9.4   There are no particular implications for rural communities in Peterborough arising from this report.

10.   BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

10.1   'Contextual Safeguarding: An Overview of the Operational, Strategic and Conceptual Framework': Published by the University of Bedfordshire and Carlene Firmin

11.   APPENDICES
11.1   Appendix 1: 'Contextual Safeguarding: An Overview of the Operational, Strategic and Conceptual Framework': Published by the University of Bedfordshire and Carlene Firmin