CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 11
19 JULY 2023	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	John Gregg Executive Director Children and Young People's Service	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Councillor Lynne Ayres Cabinet Member for Education, Skills, and Children's Services	
Contact Officer(s):	Michaela Berry, Acting Head of Service Corporate Parenting	Tel. 07930 832309

MISSING CHILDREN IN CARE REPORT

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: Alison Bennett, Service Director, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	**Deadline date:** N/A
It is recommended that members of Corporate Parenting Committee: 1. Note the content of the report, and 2. Raise any questions with the lead officer	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

1.1 This report is submitted to Corporate Parenting Committee to inform Councillors of the current situation with regard to Children in Care who go missing.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

2.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Corporate Parenting Committee in respect of the numbers of children in care that go missing and to provide details behind the data presented. The data within this report is from 23rd June 2023.

2.2 This report is for Corporate Parenting Committee to consider under its Terms of Reference No. 2.4.4.6 To monitor the quality of care delivered by the City Council and review the performance of outcomes for children and young people in care.

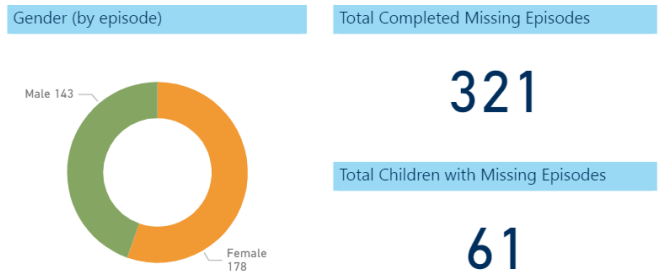2.3 *How does this report link to the Children in care Promise?*

This links to 'Keeping you Safe'. We will work to keep you safe and help you to keep yourself safe.
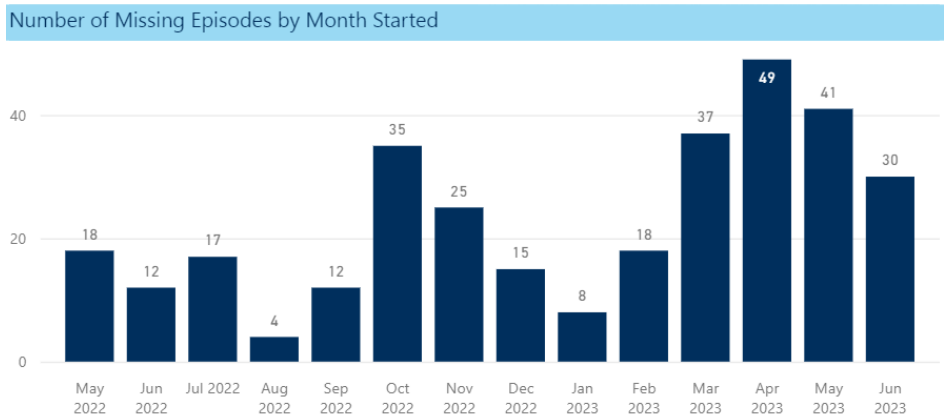
3. TIMESCALES

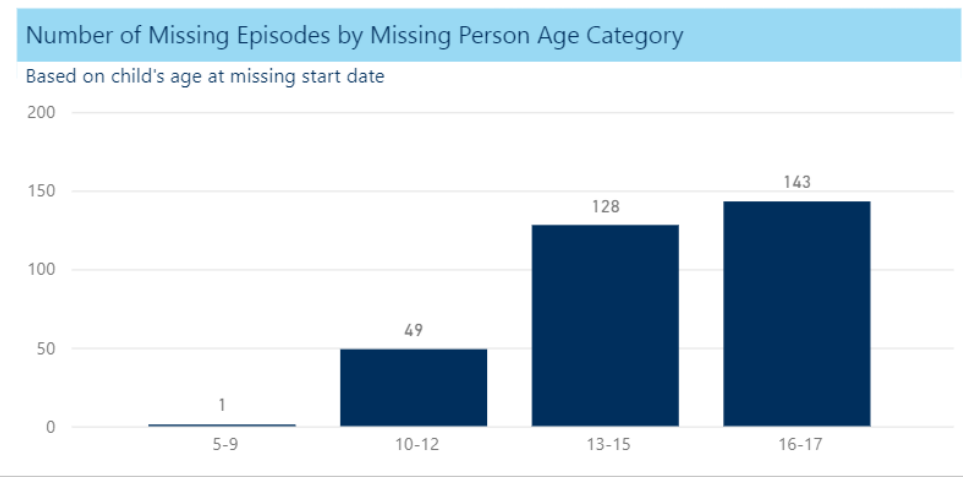| Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	**NO**	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	

4.   BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

4.1   Over the last 13 months there have been a total of 321 missing episodes for children in care, this involved 61 different children. Of the 321 missing episodes; 44 % were boys and 56% where girls.

Gender (by episode)

Male 143

Female 178

Total Completed Missing Episodes

321

Total Children with Missing Episodes

61

4.2   The graph below shows the total number of missing episodes each month, for the last 13 months. The number of children going missing from care were significantly lower during the lockdown periods but have climbed back to the higher level.
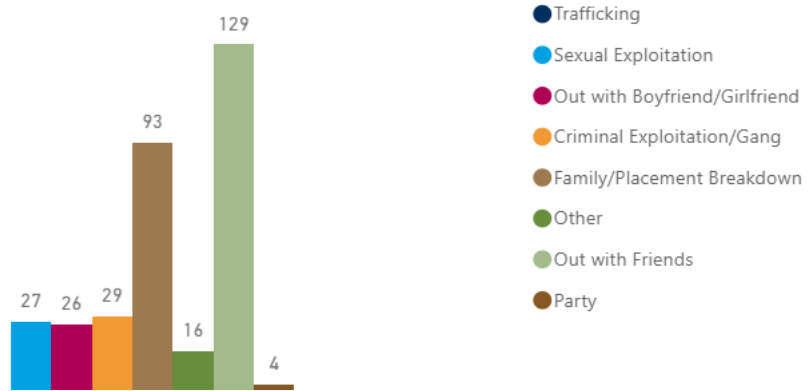
Number of Missing Episodes by Month Started

Month	Value
May 2022	18
Jun 2022	12
Jul 2022	17
Aug 2022	4
Sep 2022	12
Oct 2022	35
Nov 2022	25
Dec 2022	15
Jan 2023	8
Feb 2023	18
Mar 2023	37
Apr 2023	49
May 2023	41
Jun 2023	30

4.3   The graph below shows the number of missing espisodes for each age category. The highest number of missing episdodes is for the 16-17 year old age category.

Number of Missing Episodes by Missing Person Age Category

Based on child's age at missing start date

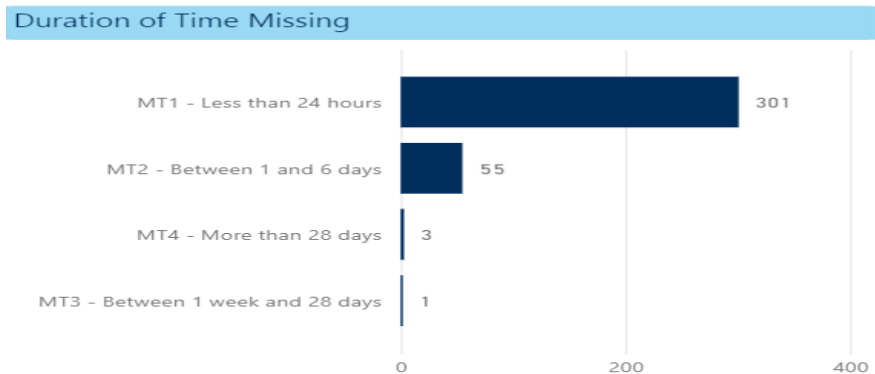| Age Category	Value
5-9	1
10-12	49
13-15	128
16-17	143

4.4   The graph below shows the reason for the missing episode for the child or young person. The most common reason is that young people are out with friends and do not return on time. This graph does show that we have had 27 missing incidents linked to sexual exploitation and 29 incidents linked to criminal exploitation in the last 13 months.

Missing Reasons

- Trafficking
- Sexual Exploitation
- Out with Boyfriend/Girlfriend
- Criminal Exploitation/Gang
- Family/Placement Breakdown
- Other
- Out with Friends
- Party

27, 26, 29, 93, 16, 129, 4

4.5   Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is defined as (From Working Together 2018);
a form of child sexual abuse occurring where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

4.6   Child Criminal Exploitation(CCE) is defined by the NSPCC as;
child abuse where children and young people are manipulated and coerced into committing crimes.

4.7   Children and young people who go missing from care may need safeguarding against the risk of being drawn into offending behaviour by gangs or criminal groups.

4.8   We use a risk assessment tool where it is suspected that a child or young person is being exploited through CSE or CCE. Where a risk is identified there is a multiagency response provided through direct work and disruption monitored a multi-agency operational meeting MACE (Missing and Child Exploitation) held on a monthly basis to share information across professions and review intelligence to ensure that those young people most at risk are identified and that clear plans are put in place to mitigate the risks.

The length of time the episodes last is key information, as can be seen below, the majority of missing episodes last less than 24 hours.

Duration of Time Missing

MT1 – Less than 24 hours	301
MT2 – Between 1 and 6 days	55
MT4 – More than 28 days	3
MT3 – Between 1 week and 28 days	1

4.9   The data below is just from the last 3 months, so more focused that the data above. This shows how many times, each child that had a missing episode, was missing. There were 48 children with missing episodes over the last 3 months, 19 of these have just one missing

episodes, 11 had 2 missing episodes, 3 had 4, 3 had 5, 3 had 8, one young person had 11 episodes of missing from care and one young person had 15 episodes of missing from care.

Number of Children by times missing in last 3 months

Times missing	1	2	3	4	5	8	11	15
Number of children	19	11	7	3	3	3	1	1

4.10 Children who are missing from care are closely monitored and supported. A multiagency strategy meeting is held if a young person is missing for over 24 hours and when a young person has been missing 3 times in 90 days (no matter how long for). Independent Return Interviews are offered and robustly attempted after every missing episode to look at the reasons the child or young person was missing (push and pull factors) and their experiences whilst missing. The information from these missing interviews which includes the 'Voice of the Child' informs the multiagency intervention to reduce the risk off future missing episodes and harm during further missing episodes, if they do occur. As examples; A push factor may be if a child or young person is unhappy with an aspect of their home this can be addressed, or, a pull factor, if they want to spend more time with friends, they can be supported to do this safely.

4.11 Because there is such a strong link between children going missing and risk of exploitation, social workers always consider whether a child who has gone missing is being exploited or at risk of being exploited. If CCE or CSE is identified as a risk a referral to our SAFE team is made. The SAFE Team utilises a trauma informed approach in working with young people. This is supported by the SAFE Team Psychologist and where appropriate psychological formulation.

4.12 SAFE Team workers will spend the initial few months developing an understanding of and rapport with young people. As a voluntary intervention there are no demands placed upon the young person regarding what is undertaken, but SAFE worker will explain the reason for the offer of support (CCE/CSE risk) and describe what they can offer as a means of support. Young people can feedback as to how they would like this support to look and at what frequency they would like to engage. Focus is on areas that act as push or pull factors exposing the young person to exploitation that are not already covered by other elements of either their Social Care, Youth Justice or other focused interventions. Support has/can include the following with the young person's agreement.

❖ Positive Professional relationship development
❖ Exploitation Awareness support
❖ Direct and indirect psychological support
❖ Safety planning support
❖ Access to positive activities

- ❖ ETE advocacy/support
- ❖ Assisting young people to navigating professional relationships
- ❖ Practical support/Motivational support
- ❖ Advocate for unmet needs
- ❖ Contextual safeguarding awareness

5. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

5.1 This report links to the following Corporate Priorities:

1. *Our Places & Communities*
   - *Places and Safety (including any rural implications)*
   - *Lives and Work*
   - *Health and Wellbeing*
2. *Prevention, Independence & Resilience*
   - *Educations and Skills for All*
   - *Children*

To ensure that we are keeping our children and young people as safe as possible it is imperative that we understand the profile of those that have missing episodes and understand the risk associated with going missing from care and the impact.

We need to ensure that we have the right support for our children and young people and that we understand both push and pull factors (factors the child is being drawn to or escaping from whilst missing).

6. CONSULTATION

6.1 N/A

7. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

7.1 For Committee Members to be updated on the data and information related to children who go missing from care.

8. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

8.1 This report is to appraise the Committee Members of the current data and information related to children who go missing from care.

9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 No alternative options required for this report as this data is provided for information purposes only.

10. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

10.1 There are no financial implications as this report is for information only.

Legal Implications

10.2 There are no legal implications as this report is for information only.

Equalities Implications

10.3 None

10.4 **Other Implications**

This report relates to children in care and gives information to members around the numbers of children who go missing from care.

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

11.1   None

12. APPENDICES

12.1   *None*