

Corporate Parenting Panel

30 April 2021

Children who go Missing from Home and Care - ERASE



Report of Lisa Wood – Strategic Manager, First Contact & County Wide Specialist Services, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report outlines the recent activity and development of ERASE Team which includes children who go missing from home or care, since the service was reviewed in 2019 and includes performance data from the last two reporting years.

Executive Summary

- 2 The Child Exploitation - ERASE team as a result of a review in 2019 has expanded its remit and reach to include support to young people who are experiencing all forms of child exploitation.
- 3 A dedicated Missing from home Co-ordinator has been recruited into the Child Exploitation - ERASE team to improve the response to and children who go missing from home or care in Durham alongside an additional team member to provide interventions for children and young people who are victims or at risk of child criminal exploitation (CCE)
- 4 The service has worked creatively and innovatively during Covid-19 to minimise the risk of young people disengaging, and develop interventions using digital platforms as well as continuing to meet young people face to face to minimise the risks of further harm to those who go missing from home or care.
- 5 Increased Partnership development and oversight via the DSCP, Strategic Child Exploitation Group (CEG) as well as the implementation of a number of additional dynamic meetings all help to provide a timely and appropriate response to children who go missing from home or care as well as those vulnerable to exploitation.

Recommendation

- 6 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to:
 - (a) note the contents of this report.

Background

- 7 Following a multi-agency response to growing concerns about child sexual exploitation (CSE) in Durham, the ERASE team was launched as a pilot in September 2015. The remit of the team was to work with Durham Constabulary to develop multi-agency responses to the problem of child sexual exploitation and missing children Durham.
- 8 In 2017 the ERASE team following an evaluation of the pilot was developed and funded as a partnership between Durham Constabulary and Durham Children's Services.

Ofsted Feedback – Inspection of Durham's Children's Social Care Services - September 2019

- 9 The report in 2019 noted the positive impact of the service and the report stated, "*The strength of the local authority's and partners' response to missing children and children at risk of exploitation is helping to reduce risks, disrupt the activity of perpetrators and protect children. Children who go missing from home or care are routinely offered return home interviews. Information is well shared and well used. Actual and potential risks are carefully considered, regularly reviewed and closely monitored.*"

Children who go missing from home or care

- 10 As part of reviewing the remit of the DSCP Strategic Child Exploitation Group in the summer of 2019, it was identified that each partner organisation had different criteria to record if a child was missing and when a return to home interview was required. A task and finish group undertook work to develop an agreed definition and criteria across the partnership and developed a joint scorecard to support data collection and analysis. This supports an improved understanding of the Durham picture of children who go missing and develop services to respond.
- 11 In order to further this work a dedicated DSCP partnership analyst was recruited to support the development of this work.
- 12 In order to continue to improve the quality of return to home interviews and provide a single point of contact within children's social care, a dedicated Missing Co-ordinator was appointed in Children's social care services in April 2020.
- 13 Following a review in November 2019, a daily dynamic missing children's meeting is now in place. The missing co-ordinator from Durham Constabulary and the Missing co-ordinator from Durham children's Services meet every morning to discuss any children of

concern who have been reported missing and share any information/intelligence to support an appropriate and timely response.

- 14 Where a child is looked after and living in our care, the missing co-ordinator now undertakes an independent return to home interview (RTHI).
- 15 Depending on volume and demand, the missing co-ordinator can also undertake a RTHI for children not known to services or identify the best lead professional to undertake the RTHI. This has improved the quality of risk information gathered during RTHI's and improved the experience for young people and their families of the RTHI, which is now automatically shared with the ERASE Police Analyst and recorded on the young person's electronic case file. The Social Worker is notified of any harm the young person has suffered when missing or potential risks from adults who could exploit the young person, with a view to facilitating a missing child multi-agency strategy to formulate actions to keep the child safe and prevent any further missing episodes.

Governance and Multi-Agency Involvement

- 16 The DSCP strategic Child Exploitation Group (CEG) meets on a quarterly basis and provides governance for all of the work across the partnership associated with all forms of child exploitation and children who go missing from home and care. Historically, the group had a narrower focus on child sexual exploitation, but as our understanding of extra-familial risk and harm to children increases, the scope and remit of the work is expanding accordingly.
- 17 The strategic CEG membership includes senior managers from across the partnership and also includes representatives from the voluntary and charitable sector and LGBTQ services, as well as a number of representatives from within Children Services including SEND, YOT and education. There have been a number of task and finish groups identified and feedback through the strategic CEG to help drive service improvement, understand the changing landscape of child exploitation, as well ensuring we provide the right response to children. These include:
 - (a) **Insight and analysis sub group** – the aim of the group is to look at the data and intelligence gathered across agencies in relation to children who go missing from home and care and subsequent return to home interviews, to build an up to date picture in Durham and to inform the partnership on where to target resources, awareness etc.

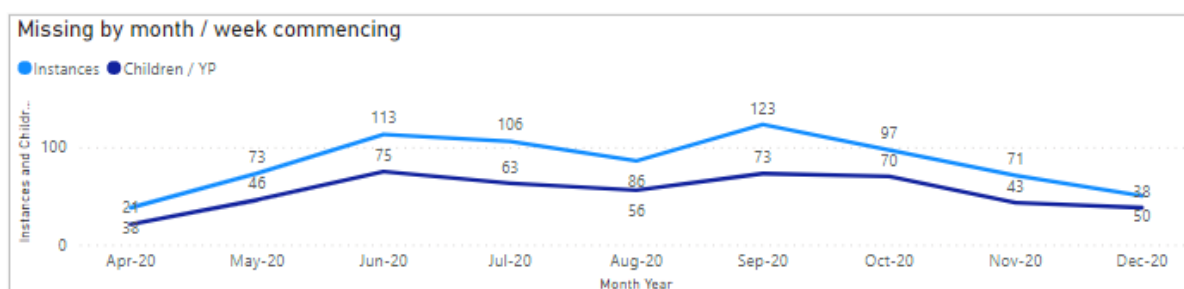
- (b) **Contextualised Safeguarding sub group** – the aim of the group is to research and design a multi-agency framework and practice guidance to safeguard children and young people who are experiencing or at risk of harm outside of their family home.

Performance

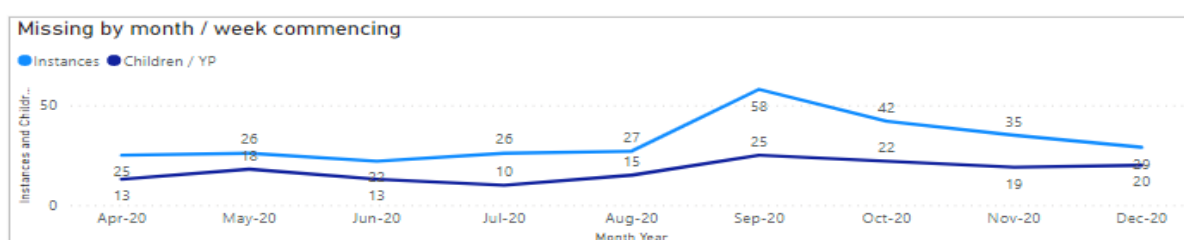
- 18 The table below shows comparative data for Q1-Q4 in 2020 and same period in the previous year. (performance data taken from Liquid Logic)

	2019/20	2020/21
Number of missing episodes (total)	435	757
Number of individual missing young people (total)	156	312
Number of missing episodes of Durham children looked after	211	290
Number of children who went missing who are our Durham children looked after	51	73
Offered RTHI (<i>% of all episodes</i>)	385 (89%)	743 (98%)
Accepted RTHI (<i>% of all episodes</i>)	336 (77%)	635 (84%)
Completed RTHI (<i>% of those accepted</i>)	306 (79%)	629 (99%)

All Durham Children Missing / Episodes (Apr-Dec20)



CLA Missing / Episodes (Apr-Dec20)



- 19 It is important to note that the recording criteria of reporting children missing and when a RTHI is required has changed and now in line with Police definitions, which may have inflated the numbers in 2020,

however we know nationally there has been an increase in the reporting of children who go missing as a direct result of covid.

- 20 As of this reporting year , we will also be recording what care arrangement our children looked after are living in when they go missing, which will help us analyse and identify where we need to focus our services in the future.

Covid Response

- 21 The Child exploitation - ERASE team including the missing from home co-ordinator have continued to deliver a service to children and young people with minimal disruption since March 2020 and throughout lockdown. Often children who go missing or are victims of exploitation are hard to engage and therefore the development of trusting relationships with professionals is key to keeping children safe.
- 22 The team have continued to see children and families face to face since March 2020, adhering to government covid-19 guidance and accessing appropriate PPE where appropriate. Where there is a well-established professional relationship, the team have made use of video calls to keep in contact with young people and have also been incredibly creative in providing alternative places to meet with young people where traditional venues were closed during periods of lock down. This approach has reduced the drop out rates due to non-engagement during the pandemic.
- 23 Additional focus was given from across the partnership to help identify young people who may have been at risk of exploitation, particularly during the period of lockdown where schools were closed, knowing that schools are safe places for children, and that children not engaged in any services are more vulnerable to exploitation and going missing. In response to this a weekly dynamic ERASE meeting was implemented to discuss any children of concern attended by all members of the ERASE Team and is still meeting weekly as a covid response.
- 24 The service was awarded additional covid funding to provide additional support to children who go missing and at risk of exploitation. The service has appointed an additional child exploitation interventions worker and an additional missing co-ordinator until Mar 2022.

Learning from Audits and Inspections

- 25 In July 2019 IICSA - Independent Inquiry into Child sexual Abuse launched an Inquiry into institutional responses to the sexual exploitation of children by organised networks. 6 geographical areas were chosen to provide evidence to the national enquiry which included

Durham. Colleagues from Durham Constabulary and Durham County Council have provided evidence to the enquiry in recent months.

The 8 themes chosen by the enquiry to explore further were:

- (a) Disruption and profiling;
- (b) Empathy and concern for child victims;
- (c) Risk assessment, protection from harm and outcomes for children;
- (d) Missing children, Return Home Interviews, Looked after children;
- (e) Male Victims;
- (f) Children with a disability;
- (g) Partnership working on child sexual exploitation;
- (h) Audit, review and performance improvement.

26 The inquiry is due to conclude in November 2020, any learning identified from the report (expected spring 2021) will be added to the DSCP delivery plan and monitored via the Strategic CEG to improve outcomes and positive impact for children and young people.

27 A DSCP multi-agency audit of RTHI was undertaken in early 2020. Areas identified for improvement included

- (a) Consistent use of the “Philomena Protocol” for children looked after – at risk of going missing.
- (b) Increased completion of RTHI shared with Police
- (c) Clearer understanding and definition of when strategy meetings should be implemented for children who are missing.
- (d) Consistent use of language to describe risk and vulnerabilities of children who go missing from home or care.

28 All recommendations from the audit have been included in the Child Exploitation development plan for 2021.

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None.

Finance

Temporary funding currently covering additional roles to meet demand as a direct result of Covid. This will be monitored going forward to review volume, demand and needs of children.

Consultation

None.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None.

Climate Change

None.

Human Rights

None.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

Temporary funding currently covering additional roles to meet demand as a direct result of Covid. This will be monitored going forward to review volume, demand and needs of children.

Accommodation

None.

Risk

Meeting the demand of surge in missing episodes and children vulnerable to exploitation continue to be monitored.

Procurement

None.