

STOCKPORT'S PROBLEM PROFILE

CHILDREN MISSING FROM HOME, CARE OR EDUCATION

Executive Summary

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is a key duty on local authorities and requires effective joint working between agencies and professionals. Missing children are a strategic priority for Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) and our partners. The Children at Risk group takes strategic responsibility for overseeing the needs of children who go missing and as a sub group of the Stockport Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) reports directly on its findings.

A Problem Profile was commissioned by SMBC and Greater Manchester Police (GMP) to look in detail at the factors that lead to children missing from home or care. This includes links with Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Domestic Abuse and Organised Crime Groups (OCG) and Children Missing from Education (CME).

Between 1st January and 31st December 2015, 572 young people under the age of 18 are known to have gone missing in Stockport. Many of these children went missing more than once and 6% of them went missing ten or more times during the year. In 2015 the total number of missing incidents recorded was 1709. 61% of the young people were missing from their family home, 32% from care homes and 6% from foster care. National research suggests that approximately 25 per cent of children and young people who go missing are at risk of serious harm from child sexual exploitation, involvement in violent crime, gang exploitation, or drug and alcohol misuse.

More children living in their family homes go missing than children in care. However children in care are proportionately much more likely to go missing than other young people. Looked after children who go missing from their placements are particularly vulnerable. Two reports published in 2012 by The Joint All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Inquiry on children who go missing from care and the Accelerated Report of the Office of Children's Commissioner's ongoing inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups highlighted that many of these children are not being effectively safeguarded. Key findings suggested that:

- Children in residential care are at particular risk of going missing and vulnerable to sexual and other exploitation; and
- Local Safeguarding Children Boards have an important role to play in monitoring and interrogating data on children who go missing.

Stockport has a total of 38 independent and private care homes within the Borough and 64% of places are occupied by children who are the responsibility of other local authorities. Placement instability is a known factor associated with children going missing and children placed away from their home authority are likely to have already experienced a number of placement moves.

'Safe and Well' checks are carried out by the police within 24 hours of the child returning, to check whether the child has suffered any harm, where and whom they have been with and to provide an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against them. Stockport Participation Team, based in the Safeguarding Children's Unit, are responsible for offering Independent Return Interviews when children return home to understand the risks associated with the missing episode, to prevent children from going missing again, to protect them from the risks they may have been exposed to whilst missing, and provide strategies that will keep them safe in future. Safe and well checks and

independent return interviews provide an opportunity to inform case planning, wider strategic planning and for professionals to take into account children's views.

Stockport Council is also concerned about every child missing education, not only because it impacts on the individual's potential achievement, but also because knowing where a child is receiving education makes a significant contribution to ensuring their safety and welfare. Children missing education are at significant risk of underachieving, being victims of abuse and becoming NEET (not in education or employment or training) post-school. In addition CME are at risk of being subject to child sexual exploitation. SMBC records show that there are 35 children and young people of compulsory school age who have left Stockport and whose whereabouts are not known, 29 are believed to be abroad and 6 are believed elsewhere in the country some of these children have been missing since 2010.

The Problem Profile contains detailed intelligence about children who go missing in Stockport and the information we have gathered will be used to help us meet the strategic priorities outlined in the Stockport Missing Children Strategy to Prevent, Protect and Provide by:

- Reducing the number of children who go missing
- Reducing the risk of harm to those children who go missing
- Providing missing children and their families and carers with support and guidance.

The recommendations contained in the Problem Profile have informed the action plan which accompanies the Stockport Missing Children Strategy.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure demographic information around age, gender and ethnicity is routinely recorded to inform intelligence and reporting
- Refine recording processes to provide an accurate representation of children who have repeat missing incidents
- Extend description definitions of places where children go missing from to include e.g. living with relatives other than parents, to improve the quality of data recording
- Improve the recording, availability and sharing of intelligence with partner agencies, gained from return home interviews and other processes such as MASE, Madison and Phoenix, to better protect the most vulnerable children and young people
- Meet with individual residential care providers to identify where improvements to systems can be made and identify steps to be taken with individual young people.
- Project Phoenix team to create links with managers and staff in Stockport care homes to provide a pathway for information sharing.
- Continue to identify patterns of behaviour, hotspot activity and risk
- Identify Multi-Agency Partners including the Department of Work and Pensions, UK Border Agency and HM Revenue & Customs to share information and assist in tracing missing children and their families and identify where this information should be held.
- Raise awareness of procedures with local schools, partners and agencies working with children and families through regular briefings and information sharing.