



Children Missing from Home and Care



A report from Overview & Scrutiny





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Reports that have been submitted to Council can be downloaded from www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny.



Glossary of Terms

BSCB	Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board
CareFirst	The Council's computer system for social care case management
Children's social care	Birmingham City Council's team dealing with support for families and children and safeguarding issues
CMOG	Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Operational Group
COG	CSE Operational Group
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
HMIC	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
MASE Meeting	Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation Meeting
MASH	Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (provides a single point of contact for anyone who wants to seek support or raise concerns about a child)
MOG	Missing Operational Group
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
Return Interview	Independent interview carried out after a missing child has returned home / to their placement – responsibility of children's social care
Safe and Well Check	Check by West Midlands Police immediately after a missing child has returned home / to their placement
TCS	The Children's Society
WMP	West Midlands Police



Preface

By Councillor Barry Bowles, Deputy Chair of the Education and Vulnerable Children Overview & Scrutiny Committee



I was involved in the Committee's previous inquiry '*We Need to Get it Right: A Health Check into the Council's Role in Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)*'. This inquiry is a continuation of that work and I am very grateful to Cllr Susan Barnett, Chair of the Education and Vulnerable Children Overview and Scrutiny Committee, for allowing me the opportunity to present this report on a topic about which I feel very passionate.

I would like to thank members of the Education and Vulnerable Children Overview & Scrutiny Committee, together with witnesses and officers who have given their time and effort to contribute to this inquiry.

The evidence we heard points to the high workload connected to missing children and that there is much good work going on. However, existing safeguarding practices and what appears to be a lack of joined up working between partners and within the City Council is of great concern to the Committee.

It is imperative that responsibilities for missing children are clear and understood, risk is managed well, especially for looked after children and persistent runaways, information is shared effectively and appropriate support is in place for children and families. We are pleased to hear the commitment from West Midlands Police, The Children's Society and the Council that this is a priority and they are working towards improving this.

I am pleased that the Cabinet Member for Children's Services has already indicated her commitment to signing and implementing The Children's Society Runaway's Charter.

When we assess progress, we will want to know about the practical impact of the changes and how they have made children safer. 'Ticking the boxes' by simply signing a charter and putting in place new policies and procedures will not suffice.

We look forward to receiving updates on the progress made.



1 Why did we Look at Missing Children?

1.1 The Aim of this Inquiry

1.1.1 Our key question for this inquiry was:

What safeguards does the City Council, working with partners, need to implement to effectively and comprehensively reduce the number of children who are missing from home and care and minimise the risks they are exposed to?

1.1.2 This inquiry follows the Education and Vulnerable Children Overview and Scrutiny Committee's previous inquiry '*We Need to Get it Right: A Health Check into the Council's Role in Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)*'.¹ This highlighted the work that needed to be undertaken to raise practitioners' and children's understanding of CSE and grooming and for the Council and its partners to better manage the risks posed for children. Missing children were linked to CSE.

1.1.3 Not all children who go missing are groomed, but when children are not where they are meant to be, it can provide an opportunity for perpetrators to be with them instead.

1.1.4 Frequent episodes of missing may be an indicator that a child is being exploited. The Children's Society (TCS), which carries out interviews with children on their return to home or care, gave evidence to the CSE inquiry and reported on the risks which going missing poses to children.

1.1.5 Missing has previously been flagged as a concern. The Ofsted inspection in **March and April 2014** (of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and the effectiveness of the local safeguarding children board) had an outcome of "inadequate".² Key issues relating to missing children that were noted at that point include:

There is a lack of strategic planning and coordination for children and young people who go missing from education, home and care or who are at risk of sexual exploitation.

Senior leaders and partners should develop effective, strategic multi-agency systems and practices to respond to children missing from care, home and education so that their exposure to risk can be minimised.

¹ agreed at City Council on 2nd December 2014

²

http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/birmingham/053_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children%27s%20services%20and%20review%20of%20the%20LSCB%20as%20pdf.pdf



BSCB [Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board] does not receive data on children missing from home, care or education and receives insufficient data on child sexual exploitation. This is a deficit of significant magnitude, not least because it shows that the local authority and partners do not collect, collate and analyse this information in a systematic way.

1.1.6 Then, during the course of the inquiry the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board's (BSCB) annual report 2014-15 was published.³ This covers April 2014 – March 2015 and states:

The Board and the lead partners have completely failed to deliver a programme of work with partners to develop good quality collection and collation of data on missing children so that partners have a full understanding of the risks to these children and can identify what actions they need to take to minimise these risks. Over the year there were various attempts to address it but inconsistent leadership grasp and a focus on getting CSE sorted deflected attention too often. This is a high priority and challenge for 2015/16.

Clearly scrutiny of challenge to this data and related performance must be included in the routine work of the BSCB. This was not done over 2014/15. The challenge for 2015 is for the multi-agency partnership through the Missing Operational Group to develop an integrated approach to identifying responding to and intervening with children missing from home, care, school and from view. This should include the development of a shared data base, some simple accessible systems and processes and the ability to ensure appropriate early help or statutory interventions are put in place with each individual child.

1.1.7 This short inquiry into missing children ("runaways") aimed to look at the headline issues only. Of course there is scope to investigate further the reasons why children go missing and how organisations should respond. It was agreed that this inquiry would focus solely on children missing from home and care, but we acknowledge that children going missing from education and those trafficked into the UK are of equal concern (we have added these issues to the Committee's work programme for the future).

1.2 Our Methods

1.2.1 We undertook two evidence gathering sessions: 21st October and 30th October 2015. These can be viewed at http://www.birmingham.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/194634 and http://www.birmingham.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/196473 (until October 2016). We are grateful to the witnesses at these sessions and they are listed in Appendix 1.

³ http://www.lscbbirmingham.org.uk/images/Annual_Report_-_Executive_Summary_-_2014-15.pdf



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- 1.2.2 Written evidence was also received. The final report is deliberately short, but we recommend that the evidence and background papers are referred to. These are available on the scrutiny webpage (<http://bit.ly/1Hwbz9Y>).



2 Are we Managing the Risk to Children?

2.1 The Size of the Problem

- 2.1.1 West Midlands Police (WMP) were notified over 1,000 times of missing children between January and September 2015. This does not mean 1,000 missing children: some children's multiple missing episodes mean they are counted several times.
- 2.1.2 The WMP data suggests around a third of notifications concerned children missing from social services care, but this data may not be accurate. One of the reasons children in care are more likely to be reported as missing, is that care staff have obligations to report more quickly, whereas, families may wait a bit longer as they carry out searches before reporting their child missing.
- 2.1.3 TCS see some of the more vulnerable children (see section 2.4). In a six month period to April 2015 a quarter of the children and young people they saw had gone missing nine or more times (amounting to 100 episodes). Further for the three months to March 2015 the three most persistent runaways were all in care and between them had a total of 34 missing episodes.⁴

2.2 When a Child Goes Missing

Family and Carers

- 2.2.1 In the first place family members and carers play a critical part in helping to locate and support their child.

West Midlands Police

- 2.2.2 West Midlands Police are the first port of call for reporting missing children and use national police guidelines when assessing whether a child is 'missing' or 'absent'⁵:

Missing: 'anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.'

Absent: 'a person not at a place where they are expected or required to be **and there is no apparent risk.**'

- 2.2.3 We noted a concern that sometimes West Midlands Police may assess a child as 'absent' when other professionals might assess the risk as requiring a 'missing' classification. However, West Midlands Police clarified that they only make a decision as to whether a child is classified as

⁴ See evidence pack

⁵ Department for Education (2014) *Statutory Guidance on Children Who Run Away or Go Missing From Home or Care*



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'absent' if they assess that 'there is no apparent risk'. This is determined by the completion of the risk assessment process.

- 2.2.4 West Midlands Police hold a daily management meeting chaired by a Superintendent where they will review missing persons and, in those cases where a missing person is considered vulnerable to CSE, ensure appropriate action is taken. In addition, there are monthly local vulnerability meetings to discuss CSE that feed into a city wide level monthly meeting.
- 2.2.5 Members were informed that Coventry and Solihull are trialling a system regarding the questions the Police use to assess 'risk' and a sergeant is located within the contact centre to look at the case immediately and allocate resources more accurately and quickly. We hope the evaluation will help shape best practice in Birmingham

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

- 2.2.6 West Midlands Police have two approaches to dealing with the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH⁶). First, they refer children if they have concerns and feel children's social care actions are required. Second, they also notify the MASH daily of missing children, even if they do not feel the child is at risk.

Children's Social Care

- 2.2.7 The Committee was informed that the MASH receives on average 5 to 15 missing children notifications per day from the Police. All notifications are entered on to the CareFirst database. If a child is known to children's social care their social worker will be alerted. If not, then a decision is made at what point this becomes a referral and a family assessment is carried out. Where there remain concerns about a child, they may be referred to early help (with parental consent) or for a family assessment as a child in need, again with parental consent. Where a child is likely to suffer significant harm, this is categorised as a red case and a multi-agency strategy meeting is held.
- 2.2.8 We were informed that further understanding of consent needs to be developed in the city as in almost every case involving children's social care, parental consent should be sought.
- 2.2.9 If the child remains missing for more than 72 hours the social worker will arrange a **missing person's strategy meeting** to share information and coordinate action to locate the child.⁷ Officers reassured us that, where needed, a strategy discussion is held before this.
- 2.2.10 Part of the initial discussions need to assess the risk of a missing child to CSE. If this is felt to be a risk, there will be a family assessment. If there is a risk of CSE this is followed by a **Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation meeting (MASE)**, where they review and manage individual cases. If the missing child is at risk of serious harm this will trigger child protection procedures.

⁶ Birmingham MASH is the first port of call for anyone with a child safeguarding concern.

⁷ BSCB Procedures



2.3 Issues for Missing Children from Different Settings

- 2.3.1 For children living at **home** there was a clear message that their parents or carers have the primary responsibility for their welfare, even when they are missing from home. Thus, a social worker would only be allocated if risks required it and West Midlands Police are generally the family's key contact through this time, unless the family have an allocated social worker already. The family must be seen as a source of help and intelligence for the child's whereabouts. Engaging with them as early as possible is important.
- 2.3.2 Currently, the City Council manages ten **children's residential homes**, five of which are for children with disabilities. The City Council also places children in private children's residential homes. There are approximately 92 children in residential homes in Birmingham and approximately 73 Birmingham children are placed in homes outside of Birmingham.
- 2.3.3 The City Council children's residential homes have a West Midlands Police neighbourhood officer who will engage regularly, every two weeks, and they will discuss missing children trigger plans etc. In addition, there is a new **Care Home Forum**, that shares information and other partner agencies are invited. However, not all children's homes are represented on the new Care Home Forum. We suggest that all care homes within Birmingham (especially if Birmingham looked after children are currently or sometimes placed there) are invited to engage with the Forum. We feel it is important that the Care Home Forum plays a role in improving information sharing and would ask officers (commissioners and residential homes managers) to help ensure that relationships between such homes and TCS work well.
- 2.3.4 There are 653 children **fostered within Birmingham** and 656 **Birmingham children fostered outside of Birmingham**. Two specific concerns were raised about missing children who are fostered. First, concern was expressed that risk assessments may not be up-dated frequently enough to capture missing episodes and that this needs to change, to ensure they are current and up-to-date. However, we have since been informed that foster carers have a duty to inform the child's social worker every time a child goes missing from their foster home. Second, we were informed that the fostering service is not always invited to strategy meetings and that this may increase risk to children. The fostering service should be invited whenever a child is in a City Council foster care placement.
- 2.3.5 A child may be moved to a foster or residential care home outside of Birmingham, if it will help safeguard the child. Although many of these may be within the West Midlands, Members had concerns about the additional difficulties of managing missing children at a distance. We were informed that decisions about moving children should be ratified at a child care review chaired by an Independent Review Officer.
- 2.3.6 On this topic it is worth noting the BSCB procedures for missing children in external fostering or children residential homes:

Out of Area Placements:



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When a child is placed out of their local authority area, the responsible authority must make sure that the child has access to the services they need in advance of placement. Notification of the placement must be made to the host authority and other specified services.

If children placed out of their local authority run away, this protocol should be followed, in addition to complying with other processes that are specified in the policy of the host local authority. It is possible that the child will return to the area of the responsible authority so it is essential that liaison between the police and professionals in both authorities is well managed and coordinated. A notification process for missing/ absent episodes should be agreed between responsible and host local authorities as a part of the care plan and the placement plan.

2.4 When a Missing Child Returns

Safe and Well Checks

- 2.4.1 When a missing child is found a police officer attends to check on the safety of the child. The record of this is purely a notification and does not contain detail of the conversation/interaction. However, we were informed that if the officer conducting the safe and well check has any concerns, then they would submit a referral to the MASH. This may be a crime report if a crime has been committed, a non-crime number if it is felt that it needs to be referred to other agencies via the MASH or alternatively other early help signposting or referral if that is the appropriate level.
- 2.4.2 The recent re-inspection of West Midlands Police Child Protection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC)⁸ indicates that this does not always happen.

Return Interviews

- 2.4.3 The statutory guidance says that, in addition, to safe and well checks:

When a child is found, they must be offered an independent return interview. Independent return interviews provide an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children from the risk of going missing again, from risks they may have been exposed to while missing or from risk factors in their home. The interview should be carried out within 72 hours of the child returning to their home or care setting. This should be an in-depth interview and is normally best carried out by an independent person (i.e., someone not involved in caring

⁸ <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmic/publications/west-midlands-national-child-protection-inspection-re-inspection/>



for the child) who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able to follow-up any actions that emerge.⁹

2.4.4 TCS is commissioned to undertake return home interviews by the City Council. We were told that this amounts to 400 a year. Given the statutory guidance requirements, we have concerns of the high number who do not get independent return home interviews provided in this way, following each missing episode.

2.4.5 It is clear that information from the safe and well check does not feed into the return home interviews. Even though the statutory guidance says that, following return interviews, practitioners need to:

“identify and deal with any harm the child has suffered – including harm that might not have already been disclosed as part of the ‘safe and well check’ – either before they ran away or whilst missing.”

2.4.6 In addition, there is an expectation that every child who has an allocated a social worker is seen and listened to by their social worker or another team member within three days of their return, and that conversation is recorded on CareFirst.

2.4.7 TCS is not commissioned to undertake return home interviews for children who are placed outside of Birmingham. These interviews are undertaken either by the local authority where a child is placed (following a request by the City Council) or by a social worker going to visit the child. We have concerns that some children may not be offered an independent return interview as the guidance says:

When a looked after child is placed in a host authority, the responsible authority should ensure the independent review [return] interview takes place, working closely with the host authority.

2.4.8 On consulting on the draft report it was suggested that 100% of children should be offered an independent return interview and that one way to do this was to expand, review and test the compliance of the City Council's contract with TCS.

Data Sharing

2.4.9 We noted a number of concerns relating to the need to work better together and share quality and timely information between groups / partners. It was acknowledged that data sharing is a major issue. There are a number of databases for the different organisations involved in the MASH that are not open to partners within the MASH.

⁹ Department for Education (2014) *Statutory Guidance on Children Who Run Away or Go Missing From Home or Care*



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- 2.4.10 The **CareFirst database** is used by children's social care and is not available to partners as it contains hundreds of thousands of confidential records, just as Police and health systems are not available to the City Council's social workers.
- 2.4.11 In addition, the **West Midlands' Police database** has recently been upgraded to include both "absent" and "missing" children information. Officers stressed the importance of being able to pull data out easily to form reports, track individual children, and share data. Members hope this new upgrade facilitates this.
- 2.4.12 We understand the request from one witness, but realise this may not be possible. Nonetheless, sharing of information with the purpose of safeguarding children is paramount.
- ‘An integrated electronic system is required to ensure that all data in relation to children/young people who go missing from care is collated effectively with the purpose of safeguarding and supporting those children/young people.’
- 2.4.13 As discussed previously, we recognise how important it is to use all the information coming from return home interviews to safeguard children and the need, therefore, to have effective mechanisms for sharing that information appropriately. Particular concerns were raised about the quality of the information relating to return interviews being shared between the City Council's children's care homes and TCS. Members were pleased to learn that following the Scrutiny meeting the officers responsible for the City Council's children's care homes and TCS have had a helpful meeting, focused on learning and joint working and that steps are being put in place to best protect children.

2.5 Preventing Children Going Missing

- 2.5.1 It may seem illogical that prevention is placed as the last step in this report, but a key task is to prevent reoccurrence of missing episodes and the importance of safe and well checks and return interviews, to identify steps that need to be taken, cannot be underestimated. There are a range of interventions that may be required to prevent runaways:
- a. Ensuring that the early help interventions available to children and families are effective;
 - b. There needs to be appropriate interventions for children, including the provision of therapeutic support and wrap around solutions for some. The new 0-25 mental health service, Forward Thinking Birmingham, is due to launch at the time of writing and it is important that missing, or the risks associated with this, is part of their risk assessment process;
 - c. The evidence presented showed large numbers of children who have runaway a number of times. What was not clear from the evidence gathering was what additional interventions are used to stop persistent runaways;
 - d. Effective use of the independent return interviews is key; and
 - e. Given the links to CSE it is important to ensure that CSE procedures are effective.



2.6 Agencies and Partnership Working

- 2.6.1 As discussed above many people become involved when a child goes missing. If a child is in the care of their parents then the parents retain the key responsibility for their child's well-being. West Midlands Police have a primary responsibility to locate and return the child. Children's social care staff are involved in risk assessing cases and intervene if risk is identified.
- 2.6.2 The BSCB has a statutory duty to co-ordinate how agencies work together to safeguard and promote the well-being of children and young people in Birmingham and to ensure the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements.¹⁰ The **Strategic Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Group**, chaired by the Executive Director for Children's Services, is accountable to the Board.
- 2.6.3 There are two operational groups which are relevant:
- the **CSE Operational Group** (COG, chaired by the Detective Chief Inspector who is the West Midlands Police Lead for the MASH); and
 - the **Missing Operational Group** (MOG, chaired by the City Council's new Chief Social Worker).
- 2.6.4 In 2014 when the CSE Inquiry was being undertaken there was a single CSE and missing operational group (CMOG). There were concerns then about its effectiveness and a decision was made to separate them. We still heard of some frustrations about the current groups including a lack of understanding of the role of COG and the lack of correct representation. Although, we understand that the recent COG meeting was better attended. We recognise that MOG has recently begun to meet again and needs to develop strong multi-agency guidance around missing children from home and care, as well as children missing from education.
- 2.6.5 Witnesses felt it was important that intelligence from strategy and MASE meetings feed into the **Missing Operational Group (MOG)** and **CSE Operational Group (COG)** which manage risk and look for patterns in places and people.
- 2.6.6 On consulting on the draft report it was suggested that data from the return interviews should inform MOG. It was suggested that the City Council evaluate the quality and impact of the independent return interview system in reducing risk and the number of missing episodes and report this to MOG as part of the performance data used to evaluate the effectiveness of the arrangements. It was also suggested that TCS should produce quarterly reports on the outcome of the independent return interviews to identify trends, hotspot locations and intelligence to inform the coordination of partnership action (victim, offender, location) through the MOG.

¹⁰ <http://www.lscbbirmingham.org.uk/>



3 What Needs to be Done?

3.1 What are the Challenges?

3.1.1 The evidence we heard points to the high workload connected to missing children and that there is much good work going on. However, existing safeguarding practices and what appears to be a lack of joined up working between partners and within the City Council is of great concern to the Committee. The Committee was pleased to hear the commitment from West Midlands Police, TCS and the Council that this is a priority and they were working towards improving this.

Risk

3.1.2 As noted above the BSCB reported that its partner agencies do not have a full understanding of the risks to missing children and are not always able to identify what actions they need to take to minimise these risks. Members were concerned about different risk analysis being undertaken by different agencies; each one leading to decisions about what resources and activity is required. It may be that to build confidence in the system, further work is needed to ensure that there is improved cross agency understanding of how risk is assessed and managed and that practitioners in different agencies understand the reasons for different approaches to assessing risk.

3.1.3 In consulting on the draft report, the Council's Chief Social Worker noted that the current approaches to assessing risk are not as sophisticated as they should be. He suggests that risk assessments are based on counting up risk factors (a "deficit based approach") which is now at odds with the strengths based orientation that children's social care are now working with.

3.1.4 He suggests that a new shared risk methodology is developed across agency boundaries, where risk, harm and need are understood. 'Signs of safety' is one example that could be explored, which has a track record of risk work across agencies' borders.¹¹ We would support the Chief Social Worker on investigating this further.

Clarity of Roles

3.1.5 So everyone knows what is required when a child goes missing it is clear that there needs to be an embedded "overarching strategy and multi-agency practice guidance" put in place, to set out a clear expectation for staff and partners and their responsibilities within it. It would also ensure there is no duplication of work happening in the MASH and other teams. The BSCB does have a

¹¹ "Signs of Safety is a strengths-based strategy that takes a collaborative approach to working with families where child protection is an issue. This approach stemmed from identified needs within the traditional risk assessment framework inherent in child protection practices. This risk assessment is described ... as being too judgemental, forensic and intrusive. The best child protection approach is considered to be both forensic and collaborative, whereby all stakeholders have full involvement with the process." Scerra N (2011) Strengths-Based Practice: The Evidence. At: http://www.childrenyoungpeopleandfamilies.org.au/info/social_justice/submissions/research_papers_and_briefs/?a=62401



procedure on its website, but this was not felt to be adequate i.e. it does not set out the process in a clear, simple way with the expectations of each part of the system.

Policing

- 3.1.6 The Committee was informed that the face of policing will be changing over the next five years and that West Midlands Police will be looking at ways to make their processes streamlined and children safer.
- 3.1.7 Members expressed concerns regarding reductions being made to the Neighbourhood Policing Teams and the possibility of the reduction in the level of support they would then give to Children's care homes and were fearful this would lead to less effective relationships between police officers and City Council officers. Assurances were given that "demand and vulnerability" remain police priorities and West Midland Police recognise that an improvement in partnership working is essential to getting this right.

Data

- 3.1.8 Chapter 1 highlights the challenges set out in the Annual Report of the BSCB which was published in November 2015 which we would support. It also notes the need to:

Establish and embed the Missing Operational Group to improve our data collection systems to better identify the most vulnerable children so we can intervene earlier to make a difference.

3.2 What do we Recommend?

- 3.2.1 It is disappointing that not enough has been improved since the Ofsted report and the Committee agrees overall with the BSCB assessment in their Annual Report.
- 3.2.2 TCS developed a Runaway's Charter (see Appendix 2) in 2014 to set out some clear expectations of what local authorities should be putting in place to protect children. Many local authorities have signed this and we recommend the City Council sign and embed this Charter.
- 3.2.3 To underpin this we have set out the need to develop and embed an overarching strategy and multi-agency guidance for both missing children and for looked after children placed out of Birmingham who go missing so:
- responsibilities are clear and understood;
 - risk is managed well (especially for looked after children and persistent runaways);
 - information is shared effectively; and
 - appropriate support is in place for children and families.
- 3.2.4 This should include a clear set of expectations in the contracts when placing Birmingham children in foster homes, children's residential care homes and supported living that are not managed by the City Council.



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- 3.2.5 During consultation on the draft report the BSCB suggested that this does not require a separate stand-alone strategy, but could be achieved through a refresh of the multi-agency CSE Framework and Strategy 2015-2017 to greater emphasise the role of the Strategic CSE Sub-Group and MOG in tackling missing children. We are content for practitioners to determine how best to achieve this recommendation.
- 3.2.6 We also suggest that an update on children missing from care is taken to the Corporate Parenting Board.
- 3.2.7 Regular updates are to be provided to the Education and Vulnerable Children O&S Committee from those involved, BSCB, West Midlands Police, TCS and City Council Officers.
- 3.2.8 To assess progress, we will want to know about the practical impact of the changes and how they have made children safer. 'Ticking the boxes' by simply signing a charter and putting in place new policies and procedures will not suffice.

	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R01	That our signing up to the 'Runaway's Charter' is ratified at January 2016 City Council.	Cabinet Member Children's Services	January 2016
R02	Develop an overarching strategy for missing children so responsibilities are clear and understood, risk is managed well, especially for looked after children and persistent runaways, information is shared effectively and appropriate support is in place for children and families.	Cabinet Member for Children's Services Chair, Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board	Feedback to Education and Vulnerable Children O&S Committee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 April 2016 • Thereafter until completed
R03	Progress towards achievement of these recommendations should be reported to the Education and Vulnerable Children Overview and Scrutiny Committee no later than April 2016. Subsequent progress reports will be scheduled by the Committee thereafter, until all recommendations are implemented.	Cabinet Member for Children's Services Chair, Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board	April 2016

Motion to City Council

That the recommendations above be approved, and that the Executive be requested to pursue their implementation.



Appendix 1: Witnesses

We would like to thank the following for the evidence they presented for this inquiry.

Simon Cross	Business Co-ordinator, Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB)
Michelle Gardiner	Assistant Head of Service, Internal Fostering, Birmingham City Council
Alastair Gibbons	Executive Director for Children's Services, Birmingham City Council
Chief Inspector Karen Greasley	Strategic Birmingham Partnership Police Manager, West Midlands Police
Sivay Heer	Head of Service, Integrated Services and Care - East Children in Care, Birmingham City Council
Bali Hothi	Programme Manager, The Children's Society
DCI Dawn Miskella	Child abuse lead in Birmingham and the Police lead for Birmingham MASH and Chair of the CSE Operational Group (COG), West Midlands Police
Debbie Southwood	Children's Services Manager, Barnardos
Val Thompson	Internal Residential Homes Children in Care, Birmingham City Council
Christine Wellington	Head of Service Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
Rob Willoughby	Area Director, The Children's Society
DCI Dean Young	Strategic lead for CSE in West Midlands, West Midlands Police

THE RUNAWAYS' CHARTER



_____ has committed to:

Count

We have a clear picture of the numbers of all children running away or going missing from care or home in our area, and regularly analyse the data to look for trends and hotspots.

Think

We address the problems of identifying and responding to children who run away in key strategy documents, such as the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Local Safeguarding Children Board plans and other strategic plans for young people set out by the local authority.

Our Local Safeguarding Children Board has a set of protocols for preventing running away and dealing with incidents when they occur. There is a named person with responsibility for coordinating responses to runaways and missing children and young people.

We make sure that every professional who works to prevent repeated running away and responds to children and young people who run away, has a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities.

Act

We make available to children and young people, professionals, parents and carers, information on the risks of running away as well as information on 'safe places' where runaways can seek support.

Our agencies recognise that young people of 15, 16 and 17-years-old are not adults and should receive a response to keep them safe, just as younger children do.

Prevent

Our agencies work together and work with parents and carers to prevent repeat instances of running away.

We understand that running away is an indicator of need and requires appropriate responses from local agencies, including a police safe and well check and independent return interview. If a child runs away more than once there should be a presumption that they are at risk of significant harm which requires an appropriate response, such as a multi-agency risk management meeting.



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THE RUNAWAYS' CHARTER



How runaways should be treated:

Be understanding, calm and relaxed with us

Don't automatically think we have been 'wasting your time' or have done something wrong. Children and young people can run away for a number of reasons, including abuse, neglect and grooming for child sexual exploitation. Young people are more likely to open up and allow you to help if you treat us with respect and understanding.

Help us trust you and don't judge us

We need a person that we can trust, that listens and doesn't judge - body language is important. It is important to develop trusting relationships - we might be in danger, but we may not feel able to tell you about it if we don't trust you to listen without judgment.

Be straightforward and honest with us

Where the law stops you from keeping things confidential, explain this to us and involve us in the process of sharing information. Be honest with us about what information you are sharing, why you are doing it and who you are sharing it with - we want to know what's being said and to whom.

Listen to us and take us seriously

Please listen to what we tell you and don't assume you know the facts about a situation until you have heard us. Support us when we come to you and talk about what is happening.

Explain things to us. Give us choices and don't force us into making decisions that we don't understand

Take the time to explain to us the reasons why we need to do certain things, such as attend school, rather than simply telling us that we have to. We need to understand the benefits of doing something, rather than simply being threatened with the consequences of not doing it.

Show us respect

If you need to cancel a meeting, tell us why and rearrange to see us.



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