Prevalence Report For Children Missing from Home and Care in Oxfordshire

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Prevalence of Children going Missing in Oxfordshire

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper provides an executive summary of children reported as missing from home and children cared for by Oxfordshire County Council during the period:
1st January 2020 to 30th June 2020.

The paper provides an analysis of the primary patterns, trends and concerns across the county, the actions being taken to address these and recommendations to consider implementing to mitigate and address new risk and needs.

This paper is not intended to reflect the full picture of all the work undertaken by the Children at Risk of Child Exploitation and Missing Panel and partners within the period. Many investigations and analyses are active, awaiting further intelligence development or exploration with operational partners, third party agencies and the children and families whom we are working to safeguard. Safeguarding missing children is a key priority for the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB). The OSCB Child Exploitation Sub-Group is responsible for overseeing the partnership arrangements for missing children across the county.

As well as central data and intelligence gathering, this paper is also informed by the discussions held with the Network Meetings and Children at Risk of Child Exploitation and Missing Panels and wider partnership membership. It draws on a wide variety of information and intelligence. Sources include information held on both Oxfordshire County Council's and Thames Valley Police databases (including crime, intelligence and missing persons), local authority databases and multi-agency records. There remains evidence of risks related to missing children across all of Oxfordshire, with varying patterns and trends in each locality.

2. CURRENT OVERVIEW

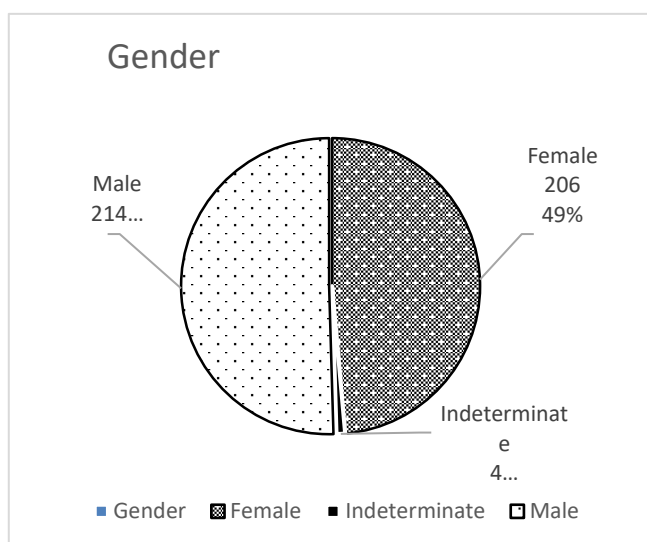Oxfordshire Comparative & National Benchmarking:

	Oxon	SNs	Eng	SE
% with missing incident during the year	9	12	11	12
Average number of incidents per child	6	5	6	6
% went missing more than once in the year	11	12	10	11
% away from placement without authorisation	1	5	3	3

This dataset reports on 'all' the children who were reported missing in Oxfordshire.

% of CLA with missing incident in year
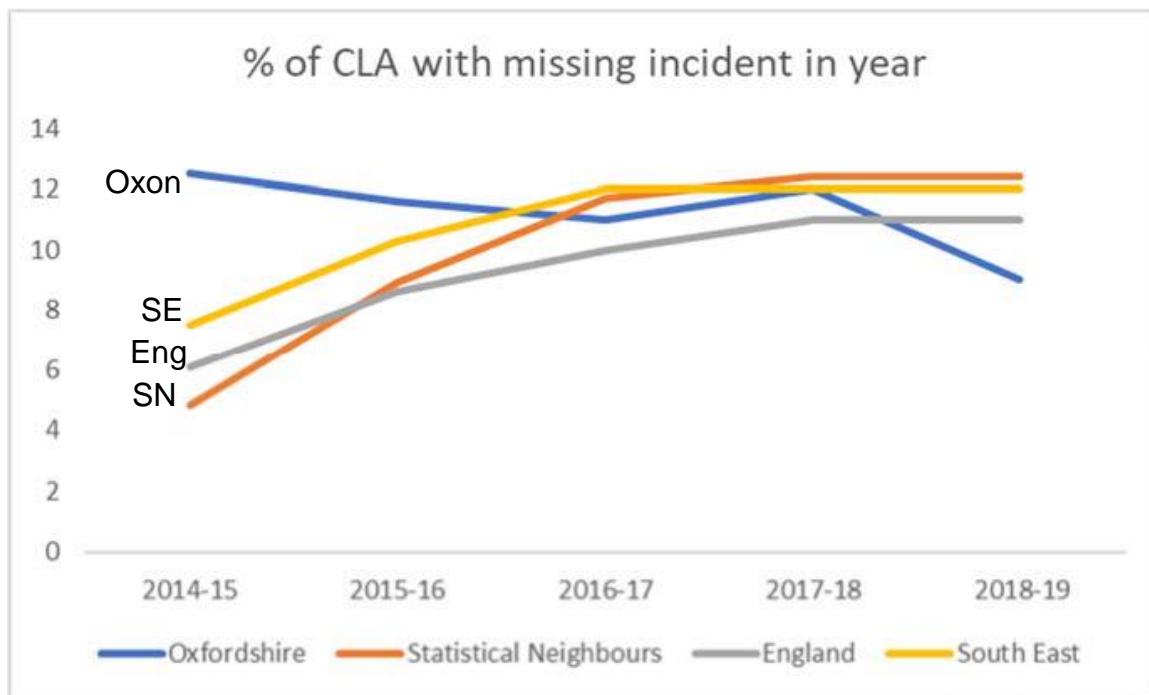
The graph above reflects the total number of children whom the local authority cares with missing episodes. Like the national context Oxfordshire' s figures have remained broadly consistent with the trend and trajectory as previously reported. The 2019/20 dataset has not yet been published by the Department for Education due to delays following the Covid-19 pandemic. There is no indication of when the dataset will be published to date.

Local Demographic Picture:

Gender

Ethnicity

A3 - Any other White background 2%

B2 - White and Black African 2%

B1 - White and Black Caribbean 4%

E4 - Information not yet obtained 8%

A1 - White British 213 50%

E1 - Chinese 0%

Unknown 26%

Legend:
- B4 - Any other mixed background
- E2 - Any other ethnic group
- D2 - African
- C2 - Pakistani
- D3 - Any other Black background
- B3 - White and Asian
- E3 - Refused
- D1 - Caribbean
- C4 - Any other Asian background
- C3 - Bangladeshi

Age Range

0-5 31 7%

6-11 39 9%

16+ 96 23%

12-16 258 61%

Legend: 0-5 6-11 12-16 16+

Headline Analysis:

- The number of boys going missing in the county is slightly higher than girls
- The predominant age range of children reported as being missing is between 12 and 16 years of age.
- All children aged 0-5yrs reported missing were reported as missing when with their parent/carer, this figure includes unborn children for whom there were immediate welfare concerns.
- 75% of all children reported missing in Oxfordshire are of a White British ethnicity.
- In summary: during the first 6 months of 2020, the most common profile of a child reported missing in Oxfordshire is a white, British male, aged 12-16yrs of age, who account for 46% of all missing episodes of children in Oxfordshire.

## 3. NUMBER AND FREQUENCY OF MISSING CHILDREN'S REPORTS

Number of children reported missing

☐ No of Oxon Children Reported Missing - In Oxon

Frequency of children reported missing

☐ No of Episodes for Oxon Children Reported Missing - In Oxon

■ No of Episodes for Oxon Children Reported Missing - Outside Oxon
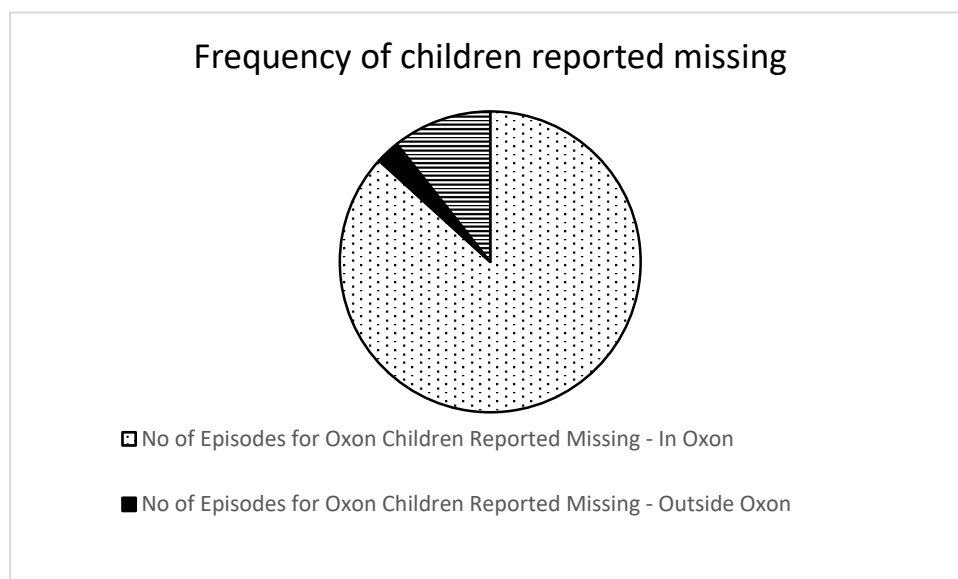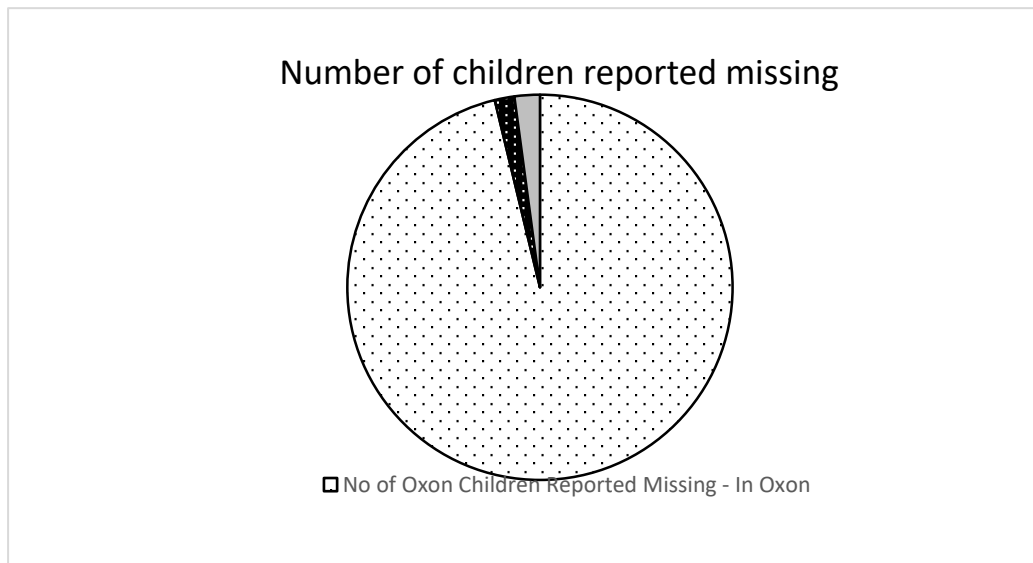
Headline Analysis:

Responsible	Number of children	Number of Episodes
No of Oxon Children Reported Missing - In Oxon	408	668
No of Oxon Children Reported Missing - Outside Oxon	7	20
No of Children Cared for by Another LA Reported Missing - In Oxon	9	82
Total	**424**	**770**

During the period reported, 424 children went missing on 770 separate occasions. The number of children reported missing whom are the responsibility of other local authorities represents 2% of the total number of children reported missing, they also account for 11% of the total overall number of missing episodes in the period. This indicates that a small number of children placed in Oxfordshire from other local authority areas are missing frequently.

Recommendation: The Children at Risk of Child Exploitation and Missing Panel chair and OCC strategic lead for CE and Missing Children review the arrangements currently in place to escalate, monitor and scrutinise safeguarding plans with placing authorities. Where evidence of patterns or trends occur in missing episodes for this cohort of children consideration is taken for the effectiveness of cross border management plans between the placing authority, provider, neighbourhood policing team and child exploitation specialist within OCC.

4. NUMBER OF CHILDREN REPEATEDLY BEING REPORTED MISSING

Number of occasions children went missing

☒1 ◩2-4 ▧5-9 ▪10-14 ■15-19 ☐20+
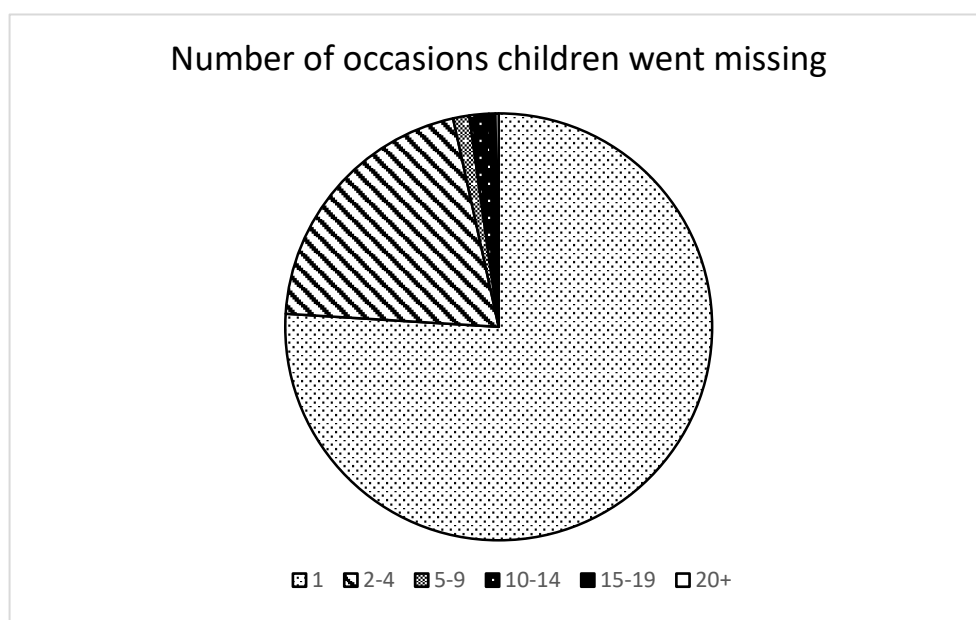
Headline Analysis:

During the period a total of 408 Oxfordshire children were reported missing, 75% had one missing episode, 23% of children had between 2 and 4 episodes of which 51 out of 84 were for boys aged between 14 and 16yrs of age.
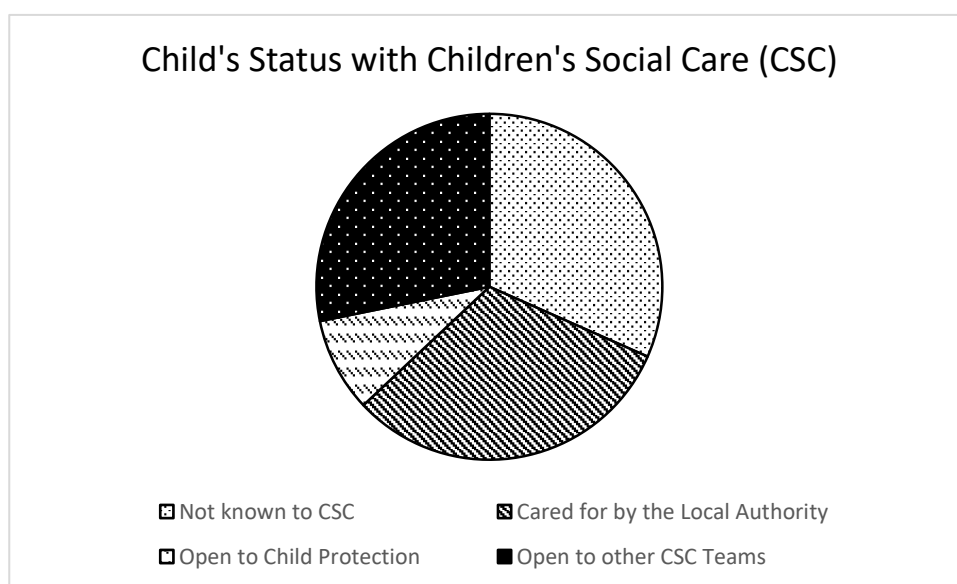
No of Episodes	Occurrence	%
1	310	73%
2-4	84	23%
5-9	5	1%
10-14	6	1.5%
15-19	2	1.3%
20+	1	0.2%

The view of strategic leads is that the overall numbers of children being reported missing for the first time and the continued trend of reducing numbers of children repeatedly going missing, are attributable to the partnerships understanding of risk exposure to children when missing, and effective local partnerships working prior to escalation to the Children at Risk of Child Exploitation and Missing Panel.

In all cases the pattern in frequency of missing reports noted a reducing and improving trend. A randomised sample of the records to the Children at Risk of Child Exploitation and Missing Panel notes that plans were thoroughly interrogated and appropriately escalated when required. Partnership planning was challenged, the effectiveness of control measures and actions reviewed; ensuring responses were proportionate, appropriate and effective.

Recommendation: The CE subgroup to undertake analysis of the missing episodes of adolescents (predominately boys) frequently going missing and review this in context of the partnership's development of a vulnerable adolescent strategy.

5. CHILDREN STATUS WITH CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE (CSC)

Child's Status with Children's Social Care (CSC)

- ▣ Not known to CSC
- ▨ Cared for by the Local Authority
- ▢ Open to Child Protection
- ■ Open to other CSC Teams

Headline Analysis:

Status within Oxfordshire County Council	Children	CE Screen Completed
Not known to CSC	129	0
Cared for by the Local Authority	128	121
Open to Child Protection	36	23
Open to other CSC Teams	115	59

A total of 279 children out of the 408 children who went missing were known to Children's Services, 128 children (68%) cared for by the local authority represented 30% of all missing episodes/reports made within the period. Most of the children had one missing episode. All children reported missing more than once within the period known to CSC

had a completed CE screening tool. This provides reassurance that those children frequently going missing are known and or open to CSC services and that the CE screen tool is now widely used in the reviews of children who repeatedly go missing.

6. CHILDREN MISSING BY LPA

The reporting of missing children within Oxfordshire has been divided into the following geographical areas in line with District Council Authority boundaries.

- ▯ Cherwell and West Oxfordshire
- ▯ South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse
- ▯ Oxford City

Overview Dataset:

Prevalence of missing children by area

□ City   ▨ Cherwell & West   ◩ South & Vale
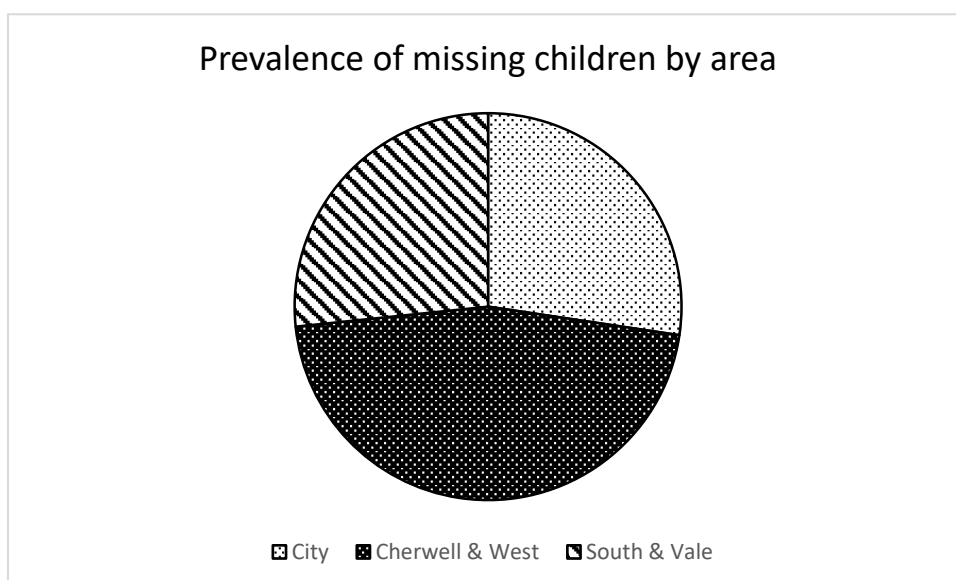
Area	Number of children	%	Number of Episodes	%
City	116	27%	215	28%
Cherwell & West	195	46%	346	45%
South & Vale	113	27%	209	27%
Grand Total	424		770	

Cherwell and West Oxfordshire:

Particular focus and attention is required for those areas that the data reveals have proportionately higher numbers of missing children than in other areas of the county and to ensure there is targeted action to reduce the numbers'

The LPA has a higher percentage of children going missing from home and care when compared to the two other LPAs in the county. Whilst there are higher numbers of missing reports, a significant number appear short in duration and is distinguished with having more easily identifiable patterns and trends e.g. children returning home late

(unauthorized absence). Many of the children reported missing whom are the responsibility of several other local authorities are placed within the LPA. Opportunities to develop consistent working practices between the placing authority, provider and LPA need consideration. Anecdotally, the trend indicates more complexities and barriers to overcome in these circumstances, compared to children indigenous to Oxfordshire given the rigor of local partnership arrangements.

Targeted partnership work will continue with residential placement providers. The concentration of placement provision in the area, the complex vulnerabilities and needs of the children being cared for, means it is likely that the LPA will continue to experience higher numbers of missing children and frequency of missing episodes in comparison to the other LPAs in the county.

Recommendation: Partnership analysis of the pattern and trend of children going missing from foster care and residential care within the LPA. That the analysis considers evidence for consistency of   local practice within provisions as within other LPA's, to identify whether reporting levels are being influenced by unauthorized absences of children, (and actions taken by the parent/carer) or due to other risks or concerns. This will help identify and understand effectiveness of local strategies in managing the identified issue and need.

South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse:
As a new reporting tool has been implemented (this is the first report) analysis on the pattern and tends within the LPA is not yet possible. A wider comparative to review Jan-Jun 2020 and Jul-Dec 2020 will need to be undertaken in Jan 2021 for assessment of the patterns and trends of missing incidents.

Oxford City:
Like South Oxfordshire, the numbers of children referred to the Children at Risk of Child Exploitation and Missing Panel for discussion have remained consistent with the previous reporting cycles. As a new reporting tool has been implemented (this is the first report) A comparative review of data with Jan-Jun 2020 and Jul-Dec 2020 will need to be undertaken in Jan 2021 for assessment of the current patterns and trends.

7. REPORTING OF OUT OF COUNTY LAC MISSING EPISODES

There is clear process and procedure in place for providers commissioned by CSC to report on children who go missing whom are the responsibility of Oxfordshire and living in a placement in or out of county. Current contract arrangements require all missing episode as being a notifiable event for CSC notification of any child going missing. The Children at Risk of Child Exploitation and Missing Panel ensures that these episodes are reviewed and scrutinised in overview in assurance of safeguarding potential risk and plans in place for their management.

8. RETURN HOME INTERVIEW (RHI)

Headline Analysis:

The number of completed RHIs	594	80%
The number of RHIs completed within 72hrs	370	62%

Push and Pull Factors identified by RHI
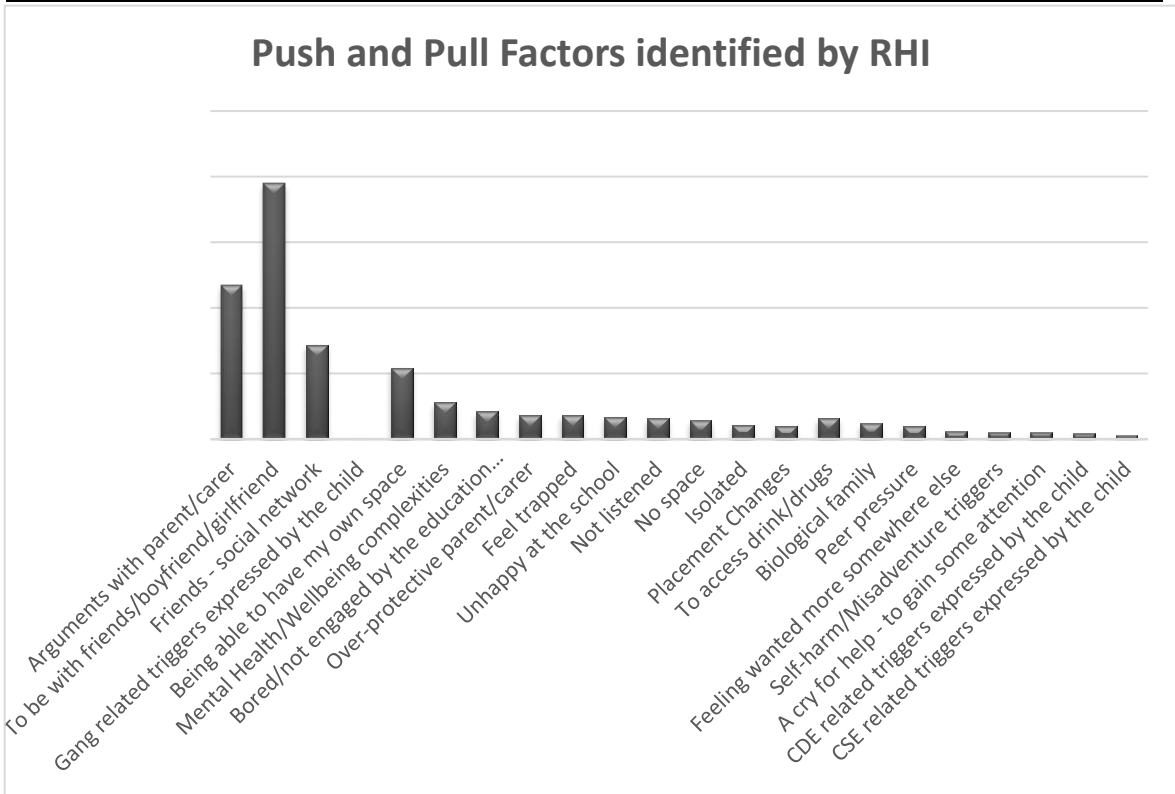
National guidance states that on return home from being missing all young people should be offered a Return Home Interview (RHI) and timescales for completion within 72 hours.   80% of all children in Oxfordshire received a return home interview on return home from being missing, which is a higher rate when compared to that for the national average and of statistical neighbours. Of those,   62% were completed and recorded as returned to Thames Valley Police within the statutory 72hr timeframes.

Current analysis highlights that 20% of RHI's as not been recorded or received by TVP. It is an area for focus of analysis for underlying reasons and any factors for informing prompt and informed actions for improvement. Current performance within CSC of RHI's is subject to weekly scrutiny by the Deputy Directors in weekly performance review.

Return Home Interviews provide information about the reasons why children go missing in the county and is critical information for the partnership in developing provision for children who go missing and to inform help at an earlier stage when problems first emerge.

Reasons young people tell us they go missing in Oxfordshire include:

- Arguments with parents/carer
- a desire to be with friends or partners
- Social networks
- Wanting space
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Complexities

The delay in recording and transfer to Thames Valley Police is impacting on the partnerships ability to fully map information and intelligence surrounding circumstances of children after they return home from being missing .

RHI's provide information for use as evidence and intelligence for operational and tactical response to quickly and effectively safeguard children whom are reported or repeatedly reported missing.   They are also critical to inform the partnership development of service provision to reduce the numbers of children going missing in the county and to highlight gaps in service provision.

9. RECOMMENDATION:

Return Home Interviews is an area of fluctuating performance over the past

24 months. The CSC strategic lead for missing children should consider reviewing and revisiting with CSC directorate leads options to commission RHI provision and delivery as a solution for improvements to for the LA to fully discharge its responsibilities in line with national guidance.

10. SUMMARY

The data suggests that across the reporting period, less children have gone missing less often within Oxfordshire when compared to statistical neighbours, regional and nationally.

In Oxfordshire, there are more instances of boys going missing compared to girls and the majority of them are aged between 14yrs – 16yrs. All children reported missing more than once had a completed CE screening tool, which reassures that children frequently being reported missing are known and or open to CSC services and that the CE screen tool is widely adopted within the reviews of children whom are repeatedly going missing.

There are clear and robustly monitored processes in place for Oxfordshire children placed out of area who are reported missing.

The number and of frequency of children reported missing in the Cherwell and West Oxfordshire LPA are key areas for focus and attention. The nature and concentration of fostering and residential children's homes within the area, means that the issues will not dissipate quickly. Partnership arrangements with placement providers require regular review to ensure that there are effective and robust strategies in place to safely and proportionately manage the joint responses required to safeguard children who go missing children. The LPA DI and CSC Strategic Lead remain in regular contact to ensure this is kept under review.

When return home interviews are completed, they provide detailed context and are a rich source of intelligence for the partnership, which informs partnership activities and safeguarding responses. However, not all children have a return home interview recorded within statutory timeframes, this needs to be addressed promptly to ensure that all children who go missing are appropriately safeguarded, and that there is provision of services available in support for reducing the numbers of children who go missing in the county.

11. RECOMMENDATION

The CE Subgroup is RECOMMENDED to note the report and RECOMMENDATIONS made forthwith.

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Children, Education and Families
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