

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 16 March 2017

Children Missing from Home and Care in Oxfordshire

Report by the Strategic Lead for Missing Children

Prevalence of Children going Missing in Oxfordshire

1. Introduction

This report provides a strategic update on the number of children reported as missing from home, care and school in Oxfordshire, including children looked after by Oxfordshire County Council. It covers the period between **01st July 2016 to 31st December 2016**.

The report focuses on the main patterns, trends and concerns across the county which will be of note to strategic leads. It covers best practice in line with the agreed 'joint protocol' and current risks or shortfalls and how these are being managed to ensure compliance with the relevant guidance issued by Department for Education (DfE) and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO).

It is not intended to reflect the full picture of all of the work undertaken by the Missing Childrens 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 Sexual Exploitation subgroup is responsible for overseeing the partnership arrangements for missing children across the county.

A wide variety of information and intelligence has informed this report. Sources include information held on both Oxfordshire County Councils 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

On the 31st Dec 2016 Oxfordshire was responsible for the welfare of 590 Looked After Children (LAC) excluding Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC);

this represents a 3.5% increase since the previous report. In addition across the same period the Local Authority supported 61 UASC; which represents an increase of 17.3%.

Of these, 103 children were in residential placements, 13 in our local authority provision, and 90 with private providers. This represents an increase of 10% since the previous report.

137 children were placed with an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA), an increase of 7.9%, of which 55 were in Oxfordshire. Across the same period we have also seen a 6.9% increase in the use of Oxfordshire's foster carers, with the use of kinship care remaining about the same compared to the previous 6 months.

3. Comparison and Trends (Jan16/June16 compared with July16/Dec 16)

When the above figures are compared the following is evident:

There has been a 4.7% increase in our LAC population (including UASC's).

Analysis - Across the period the number of LAC reported missing reduced from 67 to 63 which represent a 6.0% reduction. There was a slight increase (3%) in the number of missing episodes mainly from schools and our residential provisions. Across the same period however there has been an increase from 164 to 188 Non-LAC being reported missing.

Status	Jan - June 2016		July - Dec 2016		% Change	
	Children	Episodes	Children	Episodes	Children	Episodes
LAC	67	236	63	245	-6.0%	3.8%
Non-LAC	164	317	188	476	14.6%	50.2%
Total	224	553	240	721	7.1%	30.4%

There is growing evidence to support an emerging pattern of a cohort of children whom are at risk of exploitation from Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) in relation to drug running and gang related activities. At first glance the victim profiling appears to be; children (predominantly males), aged between 13 and 17, and in the main Non LAC but where the family is known to CSC.

Number of Missing Episodes	Number of Children	Jan - June 2016	July - Dec 2016
One Episode	189	118	135
2-4 Episodes	121	77	68
5-9 Episodes	41	22	24
10-14 Episodes	13	5	4
15-20 Episodes	8	1	2

Of these 240 children (LAC + Non LAC) 189 were reported only on one occasion. There was a reduction over the last six months of 11.7% for children being reported missing for 2-4 episodes, whilst the numbers of children with more frequent missing episodes remained almost identical as the previous 6 month.

Conclusion – this is the second report which notes a reduction in LAC children being reported missing from care (when you consider the increased number of children currently coming into care this represents a reduction greater than the 6% cited). The strategic leads remain of the view that on evidence at the missing children’s panel; the increase in children being reported missing for the first time is attributable to the improved understanding of the risks children are exposed to when missing, and TVP and CSC’s effective local partnerships working prior to escalation to the missing children’s panel forum. The strategic leads reaffirm that this should therefore be seen as effective identification of the risks, communication of the strategic plan/process, tighter Q&A/reporting, and the sharing/recording of information being used to keep children safer.

Action - The CSE subgroup has recently passed a proposal by the Missing Childrens Strategic Leads to create a task group to explore this in more detail at a strategic countywide level.

There has been a 17.3% increase in the presentation of UASCs

Analysis – Across the period we have seen a significant increase (% per person per missing report) of the number of UASCs being reported missing (this accounts for 5.6% of all missing reports across the reporting period). This is significant as it relates to just 11 children.

Locality Area Team	Jan - June 2016		July - Dec 2016		% Change	
	Children	Episodes	Children	Episodes	Children	Episodes
UASC	2	2	11	29	450.0%	1350.0%

Conclusion – The Local Authority has committed to supporting an additional 15 UASCs this year through the transfer scheme in addition to those that are located or present to the Local Authority spontaneously. A continued and sustained growth in UASC missing episodes would raise concern about the level of risk for these children and challenge the partnership in terms of resourcing and capacity. The strategic leads recommend that this be considered as part of the wider UASC strategic plan.

When we compare the data from Jan 16 – June 16 to that of July 16 – December 16, we can see that whilst numbers of children coming to the attention of the Local Authority have risen in all key vulnerable cohorts, indications are this is continuing to stabilise and level out.

Analysis – The previous report illustrated that across the last 6 months of 2015 our LAC population started to show signs it was levelling out. However it was anticipated overall numbers were likely to increase albeit it at a slower rate.

Conclusion - On review this appears an accurate assessment; as of the 31st Dec 16 the number of children coming into care over the past 6 months has risen 4.7%. This is down from 7.8% compared with the previous 6 months; representing a 3.1% reduction. As noted in the last report this should be seen a short term conclusion, which should be taken as a mid-long term hypothesis. A broader analysis of this will need to take place in April 2017 to see if this can be substantiated as sustainable conclusion.

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

- Cherwell & West Oxford
- South Oxfordshire & Vale of the White Horse
- Oxford City

4. Cherwell & West Oxfordshire

Area	Jan - June 2016		July - Dec 2016		% Change	
	Children	Episodes	Children	Episodes	Children	Episodes
North	69	146	81	195	17.4%	33.6%

As noted in the table above children being reported missing and the frequency of reports being made have increased sharply across the past 6 months. 11 children account for 47% of all reported episodes within the area across this period. The majority of the other children reported missing went missing on only 1 occasion, often reported from school or by a parent due to challenging behaviour in line with the child's age and development, or as the result of returning back to school or home later than expected. It is also noted that there a disproportionate concentration of residential providers (72.4% of all currently provided in Oxfordshire) in this area so missing children reporting is anticipated to remain higher in the north when compared to other areas in the county. This has operational implications that strategic leads need to consider. The 11 children identified have been reviewed by the missing children's panel. Some have been identified as children at risk of drug and gang related crime and there is currently some initial exploratory work being undertaken to understand this in more detail, with an initial scoping report planned for presentation to the CSE subgroup in March 2017. Safeguarding discussions between the area teams, LPA, Kingfisher Team and Missing Childrens panel representatives continue on a weekly basis considering both the individual missing

reports and the wider links with emerging risk areas relating to drug running and gang related crime.

5. South Oxfordshire & the Vale

Area	Jan - June 2016		July - Dec 2016		% Change	
	Children	Episodes	Children	Episodes	Children	Episodes
South	63	120	55	148	-12.7%	23.3%

There has been a reduction in the overall number of children report missing when comparing the previous 6 months. There has however been an increase in the number of episodes relating to some children. As already noted in the North, the majority of the other children reported missing went missing on only 1 occasion, often reported from school or parents due to challenging behaviour in line with the child's age and development, or as a result of returning back to school or home later than expected. There is an emerging pattern that is linking young males aged 13-17 who are reported missing with intelligence links to drug running activities. There is also evidence of underreporting by some parents, with intelligence gathering indicating children being found whom have not been reported missing with other children that have been reported missing. This evidence also suggest links between children from across the county who are going missing together and/or have connections and links to local and countywide drug lines. It is unclear at this time if this is merely by name association or if there are wider links to OCGs and associated risks. The partnership is currently working to gather intelligence and establish links around a number of individuals in relation to drugs related risks, anti-social behaviour and any interdependencies to mother risk areas e.g. prevalence of CSE. At a local level work is already on-going between the CSC, LPA, and housing to disrupt the behaviour, which includes the suspected links to drug related crimes.

6. Oxford City

Area	Total		Jan - June 2016		July - Dec 2016		% Change	
	Children	Episodes	Children	Episodes	Children	Episodes	Children	Episodes
Central	119	471	75	236	70	235	-6.7%	-0.4%

Both initial and repeat missing reporting has reduced over the past 6 months. During an audit exercise that was undertaken by the strategic leads on a case of a child reported missing for more than 24 hours, the judgment reached was that the case had been managed safely, with a robust and effective understanding of the risks, and was compliant with statutory guidance. In addition the LPA has started work on

a police operation, with regards to children being or at risk of being exploited through drug running. This is gaining momentum and the missing children's strategic leads are arranging a strategic meeting with the relevant police officers and other professionals to look at both the risks within the LPA and a wider analysis of these risks across the county.

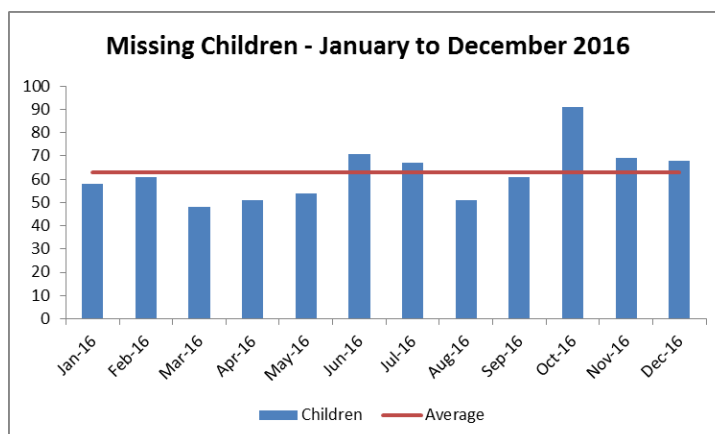
There was some focused work that linked CSE related risks to a young girl whom had been going missing from a residential provision. Through discussions at the missing children's panel intelligence was gathered about the male who targeted and associated with female children from the residential provision. An active investigation between the residential home, LPA and social care resulted in some very effective disruption work and more recently the prosecution and imprisonment of this male.

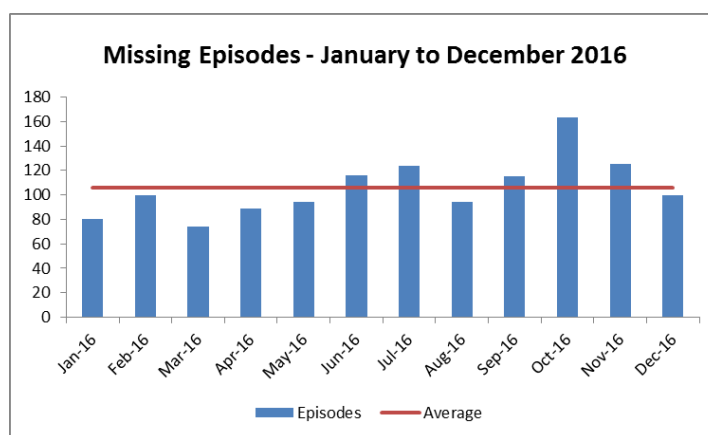
7. Countywide:

As noted below there was spike in missing and repeat missing children reports from October – November 2016.

Analysis - On review most children reported missing were aged 13-15 years old and the majority were first identifications. It is noted that this timeframe occurred during the same period of a police investigation into the alleged abduction and rape of a young girl in the Oxford area. On analysis the main reports made were from schools and parents specific to children that had either not arrived on time or had returned late. It is noted that in the two months since the allegation was discredited that missing reports are reducing again.

Conclusion - It is the assessment of the strategic leads that on probability; the spike in reporting has a direct correlation to this event as it was of significant interest to the public in terms of raising awareness of risks. In addition across the past 6 months the emerging pattern and trends linking missing behaviours to possible drug related activities has focused. This has produced tighter risk management across the partnership, and resulted in those children being suspected of being at risk, being reported missing in a more timely manner. This reflects the work being undertaken by CSC and the LPA with families in developing their understanding of this emerging area of risk





8. Reporting of out of county LAC missing episodes

There is a set procedure for providers commissioned by CSC to report on missing Oxfordshire LAC placed out of county. Under the current contract arrangements, a missing episode is a notifiable event and therefore providers (IFA and residential) must notify CSC of any missing episode. In March 2016 it was reported that the missing children's panel has highlighted that providers are not all fully adhering to these procedures and an action plan was implemented to reduce this risk. We have seen this significantly improve since the actions were implemented as noted in the previous report made to the subgroup in July 2016. This is an area that will be kept under monthly review by the Missing Children's Panel.

9. Reporting of out of area LAC children placed within Oxfordshire

The strategic leads for missing children for TVP and CSC continue to make quality assurance challenges to those authorities which place their LAC in Oxfordshire, ensuring that, as the host authority, the same safeguarding bench mark is applied to all LAC in Oxfordshire.

10. Return Interviews

Following the significant improvement in the completion of return interviews reported in the summer of 2016, it has proved challenging to maintain adherence to these procedures. There has been a 6% deterioration in the completion of return interviews across the past 6 months. It will take a continued joint effort from senior management to fully embed these processes to strengthen accountability; including on-going training for staff, resourcing considerations, discussion at meetings and oversight of quality and performance.

Action - The CSC strategic lead will be meeting with the Deputy Director to look at how improvement can be sustained. Positively the overall completion rate has

remained broadly consistent with the previous report, however the risk noted on the timely communication of the return interviews remains.

It was planned that a new reporting pathway within the CSC FWi system would be reconfigured so that missing return interviews are automatically emailed to the TVP missing children’s co-ordinators on completion. This has not been achieved due to ICT infrastructure not being able to support this interface. As an alternative solution the CSC strategic lead is currently in the process of facilitating the TVP strategic lead and the missing children’s coordinators being granted access and set up as a team within FWi so that this action can be completed.

Locality Area Team	Jan-Jun 16	Jun-Dec 16
	% completed	% completed
Central	98.9%	91.7%
Northern	100.0%	95.4%
Southern	100.0%	95.9%
Disability	100.0%	80.0%
Total	99.5%	93.5%

11. Conclusion

This prevalence report is an assessment of the emerging patterns and trends in Oxfordshire as of 01st January 2017.

The Missing Childrens Panel is of the view that increases in children being reported missing for the first time is attributable to improved reporting and recording of information rather than increasing numbers of children going missing. The increased figures should therefore be seen as a sign of agencies (including schools and supported housing providers) being far more effective and proactive in reporting missing children and correct identification of possible risks they are exposed to.

It is evident that the number of children with 2 or more repeat missing episodes has actually reduced. When set against the increases in our LAC population, this suggests that we are managing our repeat missing children cohort more effectively across the partnerships by using Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Plan (MARAMP) process which is now embedding into the RMO in NICHE.

There continues to be a daily reporting interface between TVP and CSC to ensure effective individual risk management and strategic oversight of all children reported missing within the previous 24 hours. In addition there are daily escalation and reporting systems to senior officers within both agencies.

There continues to be a strong evidence of improve practice within the partnership around children who go missing, and whom are exposed to CSE risks and other risk

are appropriately managed. All missing children processes continue to be monitored and quality assured on a daily basis including the implementation of strategy discussions for those children whom meet the threshold.

The strategic leads for Missing Children continue to highlight that the partnership will increasingly come under pressure to ensure that appropriate resources are directed towards safeguarding those children who are repeatedly missing, responses need to be balanced, proportionate and targeted. As previously reported there are strong lines of enquiry and developing intelligence which indicates that OCG's are involved in the exploitation of vulnerable males aged 13-17 years across the county with regards to drug running and gang related crime. A joint operational task group is being convened and the terms of reference are currently being drafted. A risk escalation report proforma is being designed and Terms of Reference agreed, which will be presented to the subgroup in March 2017 for consideration.

12. RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is RECOMMENDED to note the report.

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