ANN COFFEY MP

Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Adults and Children

APPG FOR MISSING AND RUNAWAY CHILDREN AND ADULTS

REPORTS FROM THE APPG LINK TO REPORTS HERE

June 2012

Report on Children missing from home and care out of borough placements:

Highlighted that the harm to children was not being identified whilst missing

May 2015

Roundtable on Vulnerable 16-17 year-olds who go missing:

Age used as an indicator of risk, older children not seen at risk.

May 2016

Inquiry into the safeguarding of 'absent children':
absent children considered to be at no 'apparent risk'
boys seen as low risk lack of awareness of extent of gang exploitation

July 2017

Children who go missing and are exploited by gangs to sell drugs:

Seen to make a choice in the same way as victims of CSE 'child prostitutes'….grooming not understood response to both parents and young people inadequate

December 2017

Roundtable on County Lines:

It became so frustrating as all services that were assigned to working with my son in this period… were all working as separate entities – with this came, on many occasions, lack of communication, oversight or duplication of what was meant to be done or not take place, this caused me great distress." – Mother of criminally exploited child

ACTIONS

2012

Department for Education Expert Working Group Inquiry into children's homes – looked into the fundamental problems of the children's homes sector.

2014

Edward Timpson, Children's Minister promised to stop placing children 'out of sight, out of mind'

Revised guidance on missing children missing from home or care.

Improvements in notifications, children homes must now notify host authority when a child is placed and discharged.

2015

Department for Education begin publishing more comprehensive data on children reported missing from care.

2016

Sir Martin Nary Review into residential care system….. Concluded distance not a major factor in outcomes

2017/8

Residential Care Leadership Board chaired by Sir Alan Wood – "improving commissioning practices", now defunct.

2019

Ofsted to begin collecting information on children who are victim of or at risk of Child Criminal Exploitation at point of inspection.

Expert Working Group – 2012, Children in Out of Borough Children's homes

The issues

- social workers and IROs not being able to visit children as often
- uncertainty about who was responsible and accountable for looked after children.
- reduced access to health and CAMHS services locally, and even education, because their placement LA was prioritising 'in area' children
- Sometimes children had to travel back home to access basic services
- Scale of missing not known due to method of data collection – DfE recorded 930 children missing from care in 2011 yet police estimated 10,000 children missing from care that same year.
- Information sharing, both locally between children's homes and police, and between local authorities

Recommendations

- **Reduce the number of out of area placements**: "Government should set a very clear expectation that out of area placements, particularly those which result in children being placed at very long distances, should be exceptional and always justified explicitly in terms of the best interests of the child."
- **Notifications**: "LAs should collaborate to develop arrangements to ensure better notification of inter-authority placements."
- **In borough but still miles from home:** more clarity is needed on the issues relating to distance vs out of area
- **Increased support: "**wherever children are placed at any given point, they are to receive the care, support and protection they need and feel 'connected' to both the community they live in and the one they come from."

CHILDREN IN OUT OF AREA PLACEMENTS – Department for Education statistics: Looked after Children

- 64% of children now placed in children's homes now placed away from their home area (increase of 77% since 2012)
- Rate of children from children's homes going missing has doubled since 2015
- Children aged 15 – 17 three times as likely to go missing as other age groups

STOCKPORT MISSING – Greater Manchester Police data

- 73% of the children reported missing from children's homes in Stockport were from out of borough placements in 2018
- More than half of all missing incidents from children's homes in Stockport: involved a child placed by another authority: Jan – April 2019

Children's homes market

2012

- 26% were local authority run and 74% were independent
- 50% of homes concentrated in three regions: North West, West Midlands and South East.
- London had 6% children's homes
- 25 Local authorities did not run any children's homes in their area.

2018

- 20% are local authority run and 80% are independent
- 55% of children's homes clustered in three regions – North West, West Midlands and South East.
- London only has 5% of children's homes but 14% of population of children in care.
- 44 local authorities do not run any children's homes in their area.

"In the North West, West Midlands and Rest of South East there is an oversupply of places, whist in other regions there is an undersupply.

This has two potential consequences:

1. In areas where there is undersupply prices are likely to be pushed up above competitive levels raising costs for LAs that use local homes.

2. Some LAs will be forced to place out of region when they would have wanted to place in region."

Working group 2012

Collection of data

- Department for Education publishes data on looked after children:
  - Age of children,
  - where they're placed
  - how many placement breakdowns they've had
  - their reason for entering care
  - how many children go missing and how often

  but doesn't collect data on whether placing children out of their home area increases the risk of them coming to harm

  Running back home over a distance

  Isolation

  Trauma

  Vulnerability to exploitation

  Collects no data at all on children going missing from unregulated homes

2015 report – 16+17 year olds who go missing (unregistered children's homes)

- Children aged 16 and 17 are more likely to go missing from home or care than any other age group.
- Age led to an assumption of lower risk
- Many of the young people who were frequently reported as going missing in their early teens stop being reported at all upon turning 16.
- Recommendations:

  Greater regulation of supported accommodation

  Ofsted should undertake a thematic inspection of how 16-17 year olds are safeguarded in supported accommodation, including when they go missing, and make recommendations for strengthening the regulatory and inspection framework

  The Government should require staff in all supported accommodation units housing vulnerable 16-17 year olds to receive training on how to safeguard young people who go missing

2017 Report - County Lines Survey – Information Here

- Contacted each UK territorial police force
- *Targeting of children in care, Out of Borough and in Pupil Referral Units
- *Strong links to missing
- Ofsted to begin collecting data on children experiencing and at risk CCE in children's homes inspections – in addition to CSE

2019 INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN MISSING FROM CHILDREN'S HOMES – ONGOING – MORE INFORMATION HERE

- Picture getting worse
- Children missing from out of borough children's homes more than doubled since 2015
- Government promised to stop 'placing [children in children's homes] out of sight out of mind'
- Does distance make a difference?
- Unregistered children's homes a big issue
- Contacting every police force, Ofsted, Children's Commissioner, National Crime Agency, Home Office.
- Call for evidence from public, practitioners and children in care
- Due to hear first hand from former looked-after children on their experiences

Interim Findings

- 16 year olds are being in pop up children's homes
  - Support but not care, staff not on-site
- Record number of children
  - 5,000 children in these placements, doubled from 2009
- Inappropriate placements
  - A child who had been sexually exploited housed alongside a perpetrator of CSE
- Targeted by paedophiles and drug gangs
- Lack of notifications
  - children not known to police until they go missing
- Poorly trained staff

Howard League

"Criminals are known to target looked after children, particularly those in residential children's homes and 16 and 17-year-old looked after children living in semi-independent living accommodation although the evidence is, again, largely anecdotal due to lack of data and empirical work.

What do we need to do?

Change the children's homes market so that provision is where it meets the needs of children and not of the provider

We need to tackle the problem of the distribution of children's homes.

What do we need to do?

Have a response to children that encourages trusting relationships to develop

Understand better trauma when children are displaced and the long term consequences to their lifes.

Work with children, parents and the wider community to improve children's environments at home, school and in the neighbourhood

Changing attitudes is key to safeguarding children

The Rochdale and Rotherham scandals and press coverage changed attitudes towards girls once described as 'child prostitutes' but now recognised as sexually exploited children

Society recognised that children were not making 'life style' choices – they were being groomed

We who have responsibility for social policy and provision now also have a responsibility to change attitudes towards children who get mixed up in criminal gangs

We need to talk about children in a way that gives greater understanding of their vulnerability to grooming and coercion by adults