

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2017/18

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

10th January 2018

**REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR,
COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

Agenda Item No: 4

**Overview of the Children and Young
People who have been missing from
care for the years 2015/2016 and
2016 / 2017.**

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an overview of the children and young people who go missing from care and the processes that are followed when this happens.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

2.1 Acknowledge and scrutinise the data.

2.2 Decide if this information is required to be reported to Scrutiny annually.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1.1 Research undertaken in July 2017 by the Church in Wales (The Knowledge Gap: Safeguarding Missing Children in Wales: Tom Davies) highlighted that in 2015/2016 almost 4500 children in Wales went missing from home or care.

3.1.2 Running away is often a sign that something is wrong in a child's life but the very act of going missing can put young people in danger. When a child goes missing the risk of them experiencing sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation or being harmed increases.

3.1.3 The term going missing encapsulates a wide variety of experiences. Some young people only go missing once whereas others go missing repeatedly. It is also important to consider that many of these children have faced, or

are facing, adverse childhood experiences and will go missing to escape from these.

3.1.4 In 2011 the Welsh Government adopted, as part of the All Wales Child Protection Procedures, the All Wales Protocol for Missing Children as a primary framework for responding to children who go missing. The scope of the document applies to all children and young people up to the age of 18 and includes:

- Children who go missing who are living within families
- Children who are looked after by the Local Authority who go missing from their placements.

3.1.5 While the protocol was last visited in 2012 it remains an *advisory* document with the only statutory element being that children missing from care must be provided with access to independent advocacy service.

3.1.6 In the thematic review of Children and Care Leavers who exhibit risky behaviours the CSSIW (Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales) noted that Safeguarding Children's Boards, at the time, needed to do more to strengthen the systems in place to gather, share and analyse multi-agency information, with particular emphasis on those children looked after who are placed out of area.

3.1.7 Although the All Wales Protocol for Missing Children includes all children and young people who go missing, this report specifically concentrates on those children and young people who go missing from care. The police have responsibility to instigate the All Wales Protocol for children missing from home and for the years 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 there have been no children and young people made subject to this process.

4. DEFINITIONS OF UNAUTHORISED ABSENCES OR MISSING

The circumstances surrounding why children /young people going missing will vary enormously. It could be for short periods or for substantially longer periods of time. Within RCT we have adopted the All Wales Protocol for Missing Children definitions and:

4.1 A child should be regarded as missing when:

- Their whereabouts are unknown, whatever the circumstances of the disappearance.
- Staff or carers have no indication that a child is likely to return within a short space of time.

- Where the child's location is unknown or reasons for absence are unknown
- There is cause for concern for the child because of vulnerability.

4.2 An unauthorised absence is when:

- A child or young person has not returned to the place where he or she is living within an hour of the expected time (age needs to be a factor).
- Neither the child nor appropriate adult has contacted the carers to offer an acceptable reason for the delay and agreed to defer return.
- They are not considered at risk and clearly they are testing boundaries.

5. RCT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LOOKED AFTER WHO HAVE GONE MISSING:

The number of children and young people within RCT who have absconded or gone missing in the years 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 are shown at **Appendix 1**. The majority of these children and young people go missing for short periods of time and although recorded as missing actually fall within the unauthorised absence category. A number have also gone missing on more than one occasion. The ages of the children are predominantly over 8 years old with a very small number being younger. All the younger children classed as missing are with their parents and are missing due to parents not returned them to their placement when expected.

The numbers who have been missing as a percentage of the total Children Looked After population are:

- 11.3% for 2015/2016
- 10.7% for 2016/17

Those that go missing for longer periods, over 24 hours, are the older young people, located within the 16+ teams, as can be seen by the tables below:

2015/16

Current Key Team	Number of Young People	Number of Times Missing for Over 24 Hours
16+ East Team	7	13
16+ West Team	5	10
Total	12	23

2016/17

Current Key Team	Number of Young People	Number of Times Missing for Over 24 Hours
16+ East Team	2	4
16+ West Team	3	3
Intensive Intervention East 1	1	2
Total	6	9

The numbers who have been missing over 24 hours as a percentage of the total Children Looked After population are:

- 1.4% for 2015/2016
- 0.7% for 2016/17

At present within RCT there are no children or young person missing for more than 7 days.

6. THE PROCESS WHEN CHILDREN GO MISSING

When a child or young person becomes looked after risk assessments are a vital part of keeping them safe and if there is a possibility that a child or young person is likely to go missing this is included as part of any risk assessment completed. Everyone involved with the child or young person needs to understand the risks and information needs to be shared so that all involved can build up a complete picture. This allows for action to be taken that prevents children and young people from going missing in the first place or having repeated unauthorised absences or missing episodes.

Through the Cwm Taf Safeguarding Board there are clear processes that are applied for any child or young person who has not returned to the place where they live within an hour of the expected time they should have returned. This involves initially all reasonable and practical steps being taken (which a good parent would take) to establish the whereabouts or destination of the child/young person by the foster carer/social worker. I

If this does not produce results then the police and all other agencies involved must be informed immediately, including the child/young person's parents. The necessary searches will then be implemented and escalation processes followed.

When a child or young person is found or returns the police within Cwm Taf provide the independent advocacy role. They will speak to/ or interview the child/young person within 24 hours of returning. The conversation /interview focus on:

- Providing re-assurance to the child or young person that it is 'safe' to talk about anything worrying them.
- Enabling them to talk about what they are running away from or to.
- Providing personal support to help them disclose or address concerns.
- Ensuring that appropriate action is taken in response to any harm or risk of harm to which the child/ young person is exposed.

6.1 When a child/young person is missing for more than 12 hours a multi agency meeting is convened. This meeting specifically looks at:

- The vulnerability of the child/young person ,
- The circumstances of how/when the child/young person went missing ,
- Media involvement
- What will happen on the child/young persons return?

There is also a duty on the Head of Service /Service Director when a child/young person is missing for a protracted length of time to monitor the situation at regular intervals

If the child/young person is missing for more than 7 days then the process is managed through a formal Child Protection Case Conference.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 This is an information report, therefore, no Equality and Diversity Assessment is required.

8. CONSULTATION

8.1 This is an information report, therefore, no consultation is required.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

9.1 None

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

10.1 The 2011 All Wales Protocol for Missing Children is the primary framework for responding to children who go missing. The scope of the document applies to all children and young people up to the age of 18.

While the protocol remains an advisory document with the only statutory element being that children missing from care must be provided with access to independent advocacy service.

11. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/ SIP

11.1 The All Wales Protocol on Missing Children Protocol and local processes that fall out of this protocol will complement the Council's Corporate priorities to promote independence and positive lives for everyone by ensuring:

- Rhondda Cynon Taf's children and young people will receive a great start in life

12. CONCLUSION

Each and every episode where a child or young person goes missing should be considered serious, due to the increase to their vulnerability and exposure to increased risk of harm or danger. Children who run away or go missing are sending a clear message that they are unhappy and need help.

Clearly the circumstances surrounding these absences will vary enormously and it is important that the reasons why children run away are sought, listened to and acted upon. It is imperative that all agencies work together to safeguard children who go missing with every missing episode being given proper attention from all professionals involved and a consistent and coherent response given to the missing person on his/her return.

The All Wales Protocol for Missing Children is now well imbedded into practice within Cwm Taf and its use is monitored regularly through the Cwm Taf Safeguarding Board with any issues arising being investigated independently through the Cwm Taf Safeguarding Quality Assurance Group and reported to the Safeguarding Board.

Count of Clients and Contacts Missing From Placement While Looked After

2015/16 (01/04/2015 - 31/03/2016)

Current Key Team	Clients	Contacts
16+ East Team	33	366
16+ West Team	35	426
Complex Learning Disability	1	3
East-Disabled Children	1	1
Intensive Intervention East 1	1	1
Intensive Intervention East 2	2	4
Intensive Intervention East 3	8	27
Intensive Intervention West 1	3	8
Intensive Intervention West 2	1	1
Intensive Intervention West 3	2	10
Locality Mental Health Cynon	1	3
Not Recorded	6	32
West-Disabled Children	1	1
	95	883

2016/17 (01/04/2016 - 31/03/2017)

Current Key Team	Clients	Contacts
16+ East Team	25	141
16+ West Team	29	270
East-Disabled Children	1	1
Intensive Intervention East 1	3	3
Intensive Intervention East 2	5	5
Intensive Intervention East 3	6	19
Intensive Intervention West 1	6	23
Intensive Intervention West 2	3	5
Intensive Intervention West 3	9	35
Locality Mental Health Cynon	1	1
Not Recorded	6	28
	94	531

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