1. **Purpose of the report**

This report makes the following recommendations:

1.1 That the Scrutiny Panel review the annual report on children who went missing from home and care during the year ending 31\textsuperscript{st} March 2018, and note and comment on areas for further improvement and action.

2. **Introduction and Background**

2.1 This report has been prepared by the Quality Improvement Service and the Performance Analysis Service (PAS) to inform the Scrutiny Panel of the profile of children missing from home and care in Greenwich.

2.2 The key aims of this report are:

- Understand the trends in the number of children who go missing children from home and care between 1\textsuperscript{st} April 2017 and 31\textsuperscript{st} March 2018.
- Identify the prevalent and associated risk factors that are relevant to children living in Greenwich.
- Report to Scrutiny Panel on the multi-agency interventions aimed to reduce the risk of children going missing and to share learning across the network on ‘what works’ to reduce the incidence of children going missing.

2.3 Scrutiny is asked to note the contents and are invited to identify if there are any further issues on which they would like to be briefed.

2.4 Areas of strength in 2017-18 include:

- Strong partnership and shared commitment from all partner agencies to work together and improve outcomes for this cohort of children.
- Calm and reflective approach to leadership in children’s social care and a commitment to learning and developing child focused practice.
• Performance management and a wide range of audit activities are well embedded leading to the identification of areas for improvement and action plans to address the issues

3. Definitions

3.1 The revised statutory guidance relating to children who go missing was published in January 2014 and includes new definitions that the Police use to respond to children who are reported missing.

- 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; and
- absent: a person not at a place where they are expected or required to be.

4. Overview

4.1 It is recognised that children who go missing from home and care are potentially at risk of significant harm. There is no precise data on the number of missing incidents, but in 2014-15, based on police reporting, it was estimated that there was a 24% increase of children going missing since 2011 in England and Wales. The data for 2015-16 shows a 16% increase of children reported missing on the previous year (NCA Missing person data report 2014-15 & 2015-16).

4.2 Children who go missing are at increased risk of being drawn into gangs, crime and being sexually exploited. Children go missing for a number of reasons; some will be running away from something, known as push factors; others will be running to something, known as pull factors. The majority of young people who go missing are teenagers which can be a confusing and challenging time for many young people, their parents and professionals working with them. It is essential for the multi-agency network to work closely together and alongside families on individual cases to reduce the risk. There is also a need to consider the missing young people on a strategic level.

4.3 Children at risk of exploitation by gangs, are a recognised priority in the Children and Young People Plan (2017-2020) as well as a priority of the Greenwich Safeguarding Children Board (GSCB).
5. **The role of the Local Safeguarding Children Board**

5.1 The statutory guidance identifies that the GSCB has a role to play in meeting its statutory responsibilities by ensuring that

- the GSCB partnership work effectively together to prevent children from going missing and to act when they do go missing
- the GSCB receives reports from the local authority analysing data on children who go missing including learning from return interviews and reports from providers of children’s homes that the local authority uses.

6. **GSCB Missing Group**

6.1 In 2017-18 the GSCB Missing Group continued to meet bi-monthly. The Missing Group ensures that:

- There is a multi-agency focus on children who go missing;
- Our responses to missing children are quality assured by analysing data and sharing learning;
- An understanding is developed of the local factors.
- There is effective information sharing between different organisations with differing roles who respond to children who go missing, children who get drawn into gang activity and children who are at risk of sexual exploitation.

6.2 The group is well established, has good multi-agency attendance, which has broadened over the year. The group has continued to contribute to the improved multi-agency response to children who go missing. The GSCB Missing group has strong links with the CSE MASE to ensure a joined up response.

6.3 In 2017-18, the GSCB Missing Group contributed to or led on:

- Further strengthening of partnership working and information sharing between the police and other multi-agency partners to improve identification, prosecution and protection. This has been helped by an increase in Police capacity
- Published Missing fact sheets for young people, parents /carers and professionals
- Completed multi-agency audits in relation to children who have stopped going missing to examine what works with findings disseminated

6.4 The GSCB recognises that different forms of exploitation leading to abuse are often co-present in the lives of children and the strong link with children
going missing, especially when this happens more than once. The GSCB has decided to combine the functions of the CSE MASE and the Missing Work Group into one for 2018-19; the Strategic Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Group (SMACE)

6.5 The GSCB Missing Group, along with the CSE MASE were key in developing a new multi-agency meeting, the Greenwich Risk Adolescent Safeguarding Prevention (GRASP) to share information across services about adolescents effectively and in a timely way in order to reduce harm.

6.6 The focus of GRASP is on protecting children, disrupting harmful activity and bringing perpetrators to justice. From January 2017, the GRASP has been meeting weekly to discuss any young person (under 18 years) that has come to the attention of the Police in the previous 7 days for: Violence, knives, badly beaten, serious incident, guns; harmful Sexual Behaviour; Gangs, including drug supply, county lines, trafficking, cuckooing; and new arrivals of high risk young people who have moved into Royal Greenwich. There are also three cohort groups in relation to CSE, regular high risk missing children, and young people on Intensive Order with the Youth Offending Service.

6.7 The GRASP identifies actions on individual cases that are followed through in all agencies to reduce risk. Peer networks, venues & geographical locations are discussed, including online spaces such as social media and websites. The meeting also considers the needs of siblings and vulnerable adults connected to the young person. Information shared at the GRASP is used to develop a problem profile of the Borough that is used in a number of ways including identifying “hotspots” to enable targeting of services to prevent harm and crime and to inform strategic decision making. This information will be shared at the Strategic Multi Agency Child Exploitation Group.

7. **Joint Targeted Area Inspection**

7.1 In February 2018 Ofsted, CQC, HMICFRS and HMI Probation undertook a joint inspection (JTAI) of the multi-agency response to children who go missing, who are at risk of child sexual exploitation and who are at risk of criminal and other forms of exploitation through gangs. The report stated: “There is strong partnership working in Greenwich and a shared commitment to improving services to all children at risk of harm. Strategic arrangements for the management and oversight of the multi-agency response to children who go missing and are at risk of exploitation are well developed.”
7.2 The JTAI identified areas of practice strength which included:

- Strong partnership and shared commitment from all partner agencies to work together and improve outcomes for this cohort of children.
- Strategic arrangements for the management and oversight of the multi-agency response to children who go missing and are at risk of exploitation are well developed.
- High profile work leads to increased investment and development of new and innovative approaches such as GRASP.
- Effective GSCB and good links across strategic boards.
- Evidence of impact from the activity of the GSCB – section 11 audits, multi-agency deep dive, challenge, influence, learning through training and awareness raising.
- Practitioners in the MASH are confident and knowledgeable about their area of business and support staff across the partnership by delivering training and development sessions.
- Effective Preventative Work through VOCU training sessions in school, community safety and YOT, VCS. Organisations understand thresholds and know how to make referrals to MASH and Early Help services.
- Calm and reflective approach to leadership in children’s social care and a commitment to learning and developing child focused practice.
- Performance management and a wide range of audit activities are well embedded leading to the identification of areas for improvement and action plans to address the issues.
- Children's views are well captured and help inform planning.
- Political support has ensured that resources for children’s services are protected.
- Clear commitment from the local police to developing a resilient and coordinated structure in which to safeguard children.
- Strong commitment by health leaders contributing to the work of GSCB and local strategic groups.
- Public health commissioners have made good progress in ensuring that front line services meet needs.
- A strong YOS with staff who understand that building trusting and meaningful relationships is especially important with this group of children.
7.3 The JTAI also identified areas for further development which included:

- The understanding and response to risk is variable across all of the agencies and for some children not sufficiently explored or known because information sharing is not robust enough
- When a new concern is referred to social care about a child whose case is already open it is not always prioritised to lead to a timely response
- Not all assessments include enough analysis of historic factors or multi-agency information or sufficient analysis of the complex and dynamic nature of children’s needs and the impact on children and their families
- Multi-agency plans do not always evidence a strong enough grip or focus to allow services keep pace with changing events in a young person’s life
- The MPS have a pan London profile however locally there is a lack of analytical capability and currently no local police profile in relation to children going missing and child sexual exploitation
- The contribution of health staff to operational meetings was less effective than strategic meetings.
- Low level of referrals from community health services reflect that there is no specific emphasis on exploitation as a significant priority area
- The GSCB could strengthen its work by evidencing the impact and outcomes of the work is has done so far and by having specific priorities for individual members and for sub groups to include timescales

7.4 A multi-agency workshop was held to develop these findings into a JTAI Improvement Plan. This plan is being progressed and is monitored by the Strategic Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Group. See appendix 1.

7.5 A specific action was identified in the JTAI Improvement Plan relating to missing children: In order to ensure a more timely, co-ordinated response to children who go missing and a more tailored approach to meeting individual needs, reducing risk and improving outcomes, a multi-agency task & finish group will focus on developing a practice framework. The focus will be on securing a better understanding of why adolescents go missing not on what happens when missing. The effectiveness and purpose of Return Home Interviews, safe & well checks and other interviews with the children and young people will be reviewed to determine whether different approaches should be taken. There will also be a focus on safety planning with adolescents.
8. **Children who go missing from home**

8.1 All Police Merlin’s (children coming to police notice) reports are screened and evaluated by staff in the MASH. All young people who go missing are referred for an independent Return Home Interview (RHI) when found. MASH or allocated social workers will review information to determine whether further services are needed for the young person and their family.

8.2 There were 105 children and young people who went missing from home for more than 24 hours in 2017-18. This is an increase on last year and a greater percentage increase when compared to national data. Analysis evidences that this rise may relate to a greater cohort of children involved in criminal activities and suspected gang involvement over the past year linked to a lack of secure and stable secure base at home. In some cases, the young people are not in full-time education, which increases the risks of them going missing. Increased parental awareness of the risks of going missing are likely to have resulted in some increased reporting. A better understanding is needed of the reasons for the increase in numbers of missing children in Royal Greenwich to inform both strategic service development and risks to individuals.
8.3 This year has seen a slight increase in the proportion of boys who go missing from home, 60% in 2017-18 compared to 54% in 2016-17.

8.4 The age of the children who go missing is 13+ which is consistent with previous years.
8.5 The vast majority of children go missing only once (79 out of 105). This is positive in that it evidences that missing does not become an established pattern of behaviour for most children.

8.6 All children who go missing from home are visited by the Police, known as “Safe and Well” checks. They are also offered Return Home Interviews from an independent commissioned service.

8.7 When analysing the missing reports the majority of the episodes occur when children do not return home at the expected time or ‘wander off’ with friends and are not at the place they are expected to be; this is particularly relevant to the younger age group. Many children who go missing from home do not require any additional intervention from Children’s Safeguarding and Social Care, Early Help, Police or Community Safety. The police check and Return Home Interviews with children are sufficient and proportionate in these cases given the low level of assessed risk.

8.8 Where there are identified risks or vulnerabilities children and young people are referred for a Child & Family Assessment in Children’s Social Care or for an Early Help intervention depending on the level of need.

9. **Children Missing from Care**

9.1 There has also been an increase in the number of children missing from care. There are 58 young people in the 2017-18 missing from care cohort. This is an increase on previous years. A significant number of this cohort are older young people who have been moved into semi-independent accommodation and their missing episode is linked to a breakdown in communication. For
others in the care cohort, missing was an entrenched pattern before they came into care, again gang involvement is a significant feature.

The increase in the number of boys going missing from care is significant. This is now 59% in 2017-18 compared to 40% last year. This is linked to young people entering the care system late when they appear to be already entrenched in gangs, as evidenced by information leading to the care episode, and there are challenges in disrupting this pattern of behaviour. There is a cohort of nine children who have been missing over 10 times over the year.

9.2 The increase in the number of boys going missing from care is significant. This is now 59% in 2017-18 compared to 40% last year. This is linked to young people entering the care system late when they appear to be already entrenched in gangs, as evidenced by information leading to the care episode, and there are challenges in disrupting this pattern of behaviour. There is a cohort of nine children who have been missing over 10 times over the year.
10. **Return Home Interviews**

10.1 It is a statutory requirement that all children who go missing from home of care are offered a Return Home Interview. (RHIs)
10.2 In May 2016 there was an inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers in Royal Greenwich carried out by Ofsted. This included inspecting our response to children who go missing from home and care. Ofsted noted that Royal Greenwich should “Embed the management process for undertaking return home interviews of children who go missing, and analyse the information to identify patterns and trends in order to aid planning.”

10.3 An action plan was developed and implemented in relation to this recommendation. Analysis shows that more young people received an interview and a higher proportion of those referred received an interview in 2017/18 than 2016/17. However, fewer children were referred for RHI in 2017/18 compared with 2016/17. This is due to our approach changing for young people who frequently go missing. A decision is now taken by the Team Leader and Group leader as to when to offer an interview. This is to ensure that while regular RHIs are offered to support the young person the targeted approach aims to reduce the risk of disengagement if interviews were to be offered after every episode.

10.4 The Head of Quality Improvement continues to work closely with the independent provider, NYAS. Key areas of focus have included:
- To ensure that social workers are aware of information shared in RHIs, all records are saved onto the child’s electronic file so that social workers have access to them. In addition, the independent interviewers will contact social workers to share relevant information. The NYAS co-ordinator regularly sits within the CSC MASH and with the Young People’s Teams to enable discussion and raise awareness of the service.
- To develop better monitoring data from the RHIs to inform the understanding of trends and themes to inform our problem profile. This has enabled better understanding of the push and pulls factors for young people which are routinely shared with the service. The NYAS co-ordinator is part of the GSCB Missing Group which provides a different perspective at times, and helps the group hear the voice of the young person.
- To ensure that any intelligence gathered in RHIs is routinely shared with the Police in a timely way

10.5 Going forward there, our approach to RHIs will be considered as part of the JTAI Improvement Plan.
11. **Update on improvement actions for 2017-2018**

11.1 The Improvement plans for the Safeguarding and the Permanence service include actions to improve the response to missing children by:

- Using information from NYAS Return from Missing Interviews to prioritise the appropriate support to children most in need. *This has been achieved but remains an area for further development. As part of the JTAI Improvement the purpose and effectiveness of RHIs is being further considered.*
- Promoting good practice guidance on asking the right questions to secure useful intelligence for the police about possible perpetrators. *Guidance has been circulated to social workers on what might be useful intelligence from a Police perspective. A challenge remains that most vulnerable, and highest risk young people, particularly where they are involved with gangs, are the least likely to engage in RHIs.*
- Timely completion of case records confirming whether police notification involved a child going missing. *Audits have shown that the recording of Police information in relation to missing episodes where children are not allocated in Children’s Social care is timely. However, further work is needed on allocated cases where risks and vulnerabilities are complex and change rapidly and frequently. There is an action in the JTAI Improvement Plan to address this.*

11.2 The Quality Improvement Service will support this work through ensuring that where needed recommendations around safety planning around children who go missing are incorporated into plans. *This is improving but remains an area for further work, again picked up in the JTAI Improvement plan.*

11.3 The GSCB Missing group have identified the following priorities:

- The group has reviewed a number of tools that are used across services in relation to working with missing children and plan to produce a GSCB fact sheet next year for parents, carers, professionals and young people. *Completed.*
- They will complete a multi-agency case audit and focus on a cohort of young people who have stopped going missing to examine what changed their behaviour. *Completed.*
11.4 The CSE MASE has developed a multi-agency task and finish group to look at an Adolescent at Risk meeting whose purpose will be to share information in order to:

- Reduce risks to individual young people which may be risk of becoming a victim or a perpetrator – crime reduction and harm reduction.
- More timely multi-agency responses to emerging concerns about individual young people
- A better contextual understanding of the risks in Royal Greenwich – mapping the problems to inform both strategic service development and risks to individuals

The multi-agency weekly GRASP meeting has been in place since January 2018. A review of the GRASP is being undertaken to analyse the impact in these areas.

11.5 The Group Leaders across CSC need to complete their work on Brilliant Basics around missing and ensure on-going routine sampling of cases. Completed and on-going.

12. Improvement actions for 2018-19

12.1 We recognise our approach to supporting young people who go missing remains an area for development and we are reviewing our approach within the JTAI Improvement plan.

12.2 The plan identifies the need for a timelier, co-ordinated response to children who go missing and a more tailored approach to meeting individual needs, reducing risk and improving outcomes. Actions include convening a multi-agency task & finish group to focus on developing practice framework that focusses on why adolescents go missing not on what happens when missing; reviews the purpose of RHIs, safe & well checks and other interviews with YP – could a different approach be taken and safety planning with adolescents. The task and finish group will learn from other local authorities where positive outcomes have been achieved. A thematic audit of missing children is planned for September and October in Children’s Social Care to inform this work.

12.3 Other actions include:
- The Strategic Multi-Agency Child Exploitation group (SMACE) to update and develop their terms of reference
- SMACE to monitor and drive forward the actions in the JTAI Improvement Plan. See appendix 1.
• The SMACE will support the dissemination of the Early Identification Tool – contextual risk alongside the Learning & Development GSCB Work Group to support practitioner confidence in using the tool.

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