

Title of Report: Work to reduce children who are missing from care and support for those who are at risk of exploitation.

Purpose of the report

- 1 To update Families OSC on practice and developments in supporting children and young people who go missing from home or care and young people at risk or victims of child exploitation.

Background

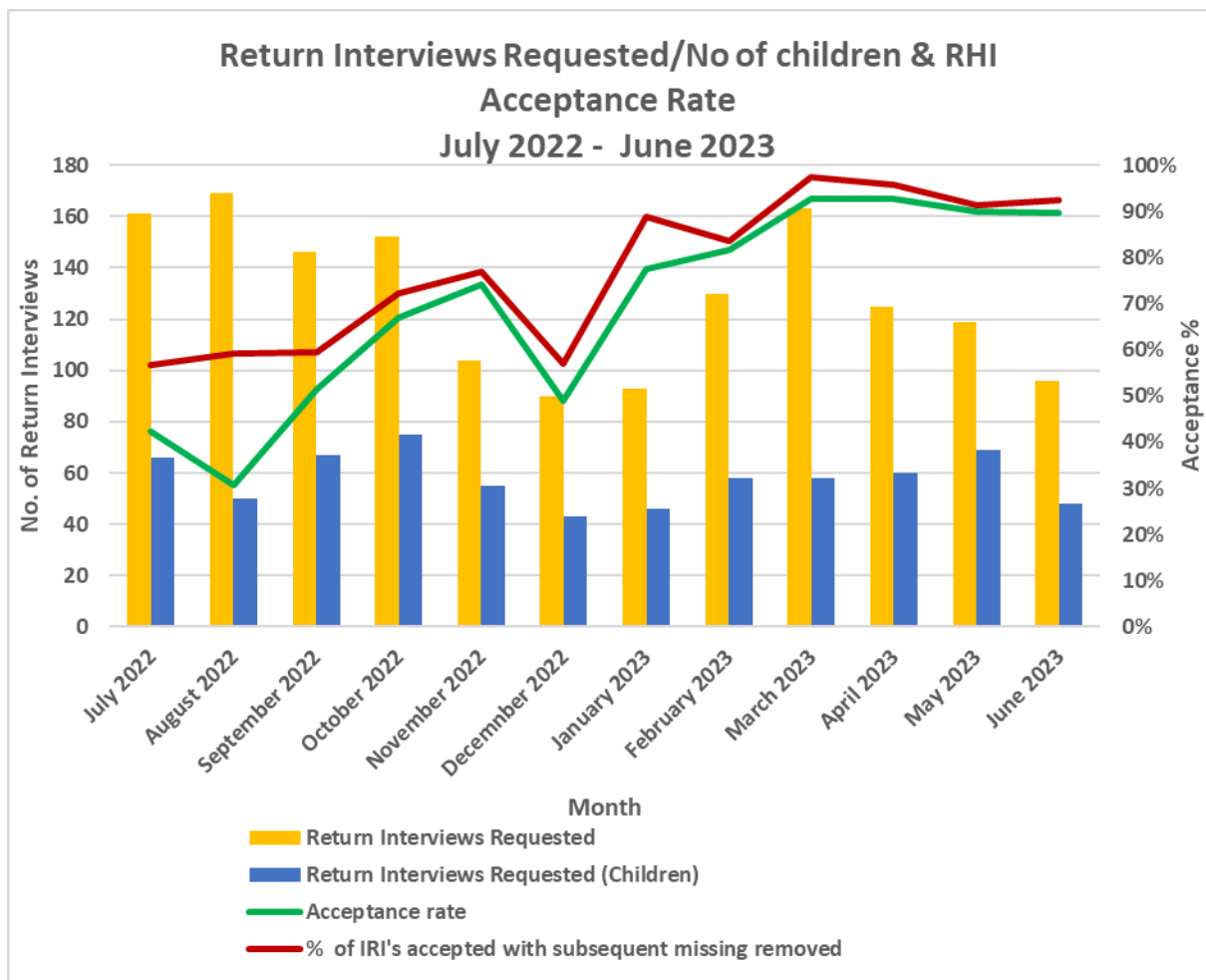
- 2 A dedicated Return Home Support Worker has been in post since September 2021.
- 3 This report outlines progress in terms of engagement and timeliness, considers practice developments and recommendations for next steps.
- 4 Gateshead Childrens Services are part of a Northumbria force wide procedures (MSET) to tackle missing and exploitation.

Proposal and/or Issues for consideration

- 5 In Total (all children), between July 2022 and June 2023 there have been 1548 missing episode recorded and a Return Home Interview offered following every episode (100% offer). This equates to 338 Young People. During the period a total of 1056 offers of an RHI Interview were accepted and subsequently proceeded to being undertaken.
- 6 This is an increase of 114% on the 723 missing episodes from the previous year. This increase is in line with regional neighbours, and is a direct result of the pandemic.

All Missing Episodes	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23
Return Interviews Requested (Children)	66	50	67	75	55	43	46	58	58	60	69	48
Total number of missing episodes where a RHI	161	169	146	152	104	90	93	130	163	125	119	96
Breakdown of outcome												
Interview Accepted	56	47	73	98	75	38	65	88	118	90	84	65
Parent accept – initial advice given, RHI with young person not required	12	5	2	4	2	3	1	3	9	5	7	2

IRI - accepted - completed by other professional	0	0	0	0	0	3	6	15	23	21	13	18
IRI - accepted - Young Person completed electronic form	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	1
Interview Declined by Young person	11	9	14	6	3	0	1	3	1	0		1
Interview Declined by Parent	7	4	10	4	4	3	3	3	0	1		3
IRI Unable to establish contact	25	15	16	23	14	19	1	0	0	0		
IRI - unable to establish contact - letter sent	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	2	3	7	3
IRI Not Appropriate	9	8	11	6	2	11	3	11	1	1	3	
Acceptance %	42%	31%	51%	67%	74%	49%	77%	82%	93%	93%	90%	90%
IRI -- Subsequent Missing Episode	41	81	20	11	4	13	12	3	8	4	2	3
Accepted % with subsequent missing removed	57%	59%	60%	72%	77%	57%	89%	83%	97%	96%	91%	92%



7 In relation to Children in Our Care, between July 2022 and June 2023 there have been 969 missing episodes recorded for Cared for Young people and a Return Home Interview offered. This equates to 79 Young People. During the

period a total of 652 offers of an RHI Interview were accepted and subsequently proceeded to being undertaken.

Children in Our Care	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23
% of RHI (Children/YP)	42%	48%	42%	41%	36%	47%	39%	43%	40%	33%	37%	55%
% of RHI (No. of RHI Requested)	68%	78%	62%	58%	61%	69%	56%	60%	60%	56%	56%	66%
Return Interviews Requested (Children)	28	24	28	31	20	20	18	25	23	20	25	18
Total number of missing episodes where a RHI	109	131	90	88	63	62	52	78	98	70	66	62
Breakdown of outcome												
Interview Accepted	41	33	50	67	48	29	36	62	81	58	56	52
IRI - accepted - completed by other professional						2	1	6	8	10	3	5
IRI - accepted - Young Person completed electronic form											3	1
Interview Declined by Young person	11	8	13	2	1	3	1		1			
Interview Declined by Parent	1		1									
IRI Unable to establish contact	12	6	7	10	8	10	1					
IRI Not Appropriate	7	4	2	2	2	5	1	7	1	1	2	0
Acceptance %	38%	25%	56%	76%	76%	50%	71%	87%	91%	97%	94%	94%
IRI -- Subsequent Missing Episode	37	80	17	7	4	13	12	3	7	1	2	3
Accepted % with subsequent missing removed	57%	65%	68%	83%	81%	63%	93%	91%	98%	99%	97%	98%

Children in Our Care

8 79 Cared for Young People have been reported missing in the past 12 months. 54 (68%) have accepted their latest offer of a Return Home Interview. 25 (32%) did not accepted an offer of a Return Home Interview. This is an increase Of 32% in the same reporting period last reporting year, and continues to increase.

- 10 (40%) had an outcome of 'not appropriate'. Examples of this outcome could be where a child is detained in custody, not yet found or hospitalised due to mental health.
- Of the remaining 15 Young People, 3 (20%) had previously participated in the RHI process and engagement work continues with those young people.
- 7 young people (47%) declined after one missing report and no further missing episodes were reported.

- Of the 5 (33%) young people who have been reported missing more than once but have never engaged in the RHI process, the RHI manager will work in partnership with others involved to develop an individual response should they go missing again.

Other Children (excluding Children in Our Care)

- 9 259 young people who are not included in the Cared for cohort have been reported missing in the last 12 months. 168 (65%) have accepted their latest offer of a Return Home Interview. 91 (35%) did not accept an offer of a Return Home Interview.
- 22 (24%) had an outcome of 'not appropriate'. Examples of this outcome could be where a child is detained in custody, not yet found or hospitalised due to mental health.
 - Of the remaining 69 Young People, 7 (10%) had previously participated in the RHI process and engagement work continues with those young people.
 - 59 young people (86%) declined after one missing report and no further missing episodes were reported.
 - Of the 3 (4%) young people who have been reported missing more than once but have never engaged in the RHI process, the RHI manager will work in partnership with others involved to develop an individual response should they go missing again.

Impact

- 10 Since the appointment of the Return Home Support Worker, RHI engagement rates have improved along with evidence of high-quality interventions.
- 11 Overall RHI engagement rates were at an all-time high of 93% in March & April 2023.
- 12 Overall engagements rates have risen from 60% between January & June 2022 to 87% between January and June 2023 which is a 27% increase.
- 13 Engagement rates for children in our care have risen to a 97% high in April 2023.
- 14 Young people have shared intelligence in relation to concerning activities in the community such as underage alcohol sales which have been reported to the relevant authorities who have responded accordingly.
- 15 On one occasion, a child has been reported missing for the second time and the parent has contacted the RHSW before the return notification has been received to arrange support.
- 16 At the request of a core group, the RHSW is providing additional support to a young person outside of the missing remit due to the positive relationship that has been established.

*“In the Return Home Support Worker we have had consistency and support for our young people, which I believe has helped protect and safeguard them”
(Children’s Home manager)*

*“It is apparent in the RHI’ that the Return Home Support Worker has developed a good rapport with the young people. The RHI’s have been informative and helpful with associates/locations whilst missing. This information can then be used by ourselves in any future missing episodes”.
(Police Missing From Home Co-ordinator)*

Future developments

17 Future developments include:

- Introduce a tracker process to monitor the timeliness of Return home interviews – Dfe guidance standards are that RTHI’s should be completed within 72 hours
- In order to strengthen communication channels and ensure managers are aware of children of concern who regularly missing, a new weekly report will be circulated to Practice Leads and Team Managers highlighting young people who have been reported missing more than 4 times in the previous four weeks. This will feed into wider mapping exercises and support Practice Leads to ensure robust management oversight of clear planning to reduce missing episodes.
- A recent review of the response time to RHI engagement has been carried out and has identified that whilst the Return Home Support Worker attempts contact as soon notification is received, arranging to meet with the young person and undertake the interview within 72 hours is a challenge. Changes to Mosaic are required to measure accurate timescales and RHI practice should be strengthened across the service to meet the demands around weekend working etc.
- Acceptance rates are currently at 92% (June 23) but this can fluctuate due to the limitations of 1 FTE Return Home Support Worker (annual leave etc.) Deploying contingency plans involving other professionals to carry our RHI can result in a young people being reluctant to engage with people they are unfamiliar with or who are involved in their life for a different reason (social workers etc).
- Oversight of the missing agenda and line management of the Return Home Support Worker will transfer to Emma Blackwell from 7th August 2023. This will build on the positive developments already achieved in this area and strengthen the collaborative working between missing, contextual safeguarding and youth justice. This role will also be considered as part of a review of services for vulnerable adolescents.

Child Exploitation

- 18 The Missing, Slavery, Exploitation and Trafficked (MSET) framework has been implemented across the 5 local authorities within the Northumbria Police force wide area. The framework is designed to provide an effective response to vulnerable young people who are at an increased risk of child exploitation due to their vulnerability.
- 19 The purpose of the framework is to ensure that a coordinated response is undertaken when considering the vulnerability of individual young people who are deemed to be at medium or high risk of exploitation.

MSET Referral data Child Exploitation – provided by Northumbria Police

	Total number of children referred	Child sexual exploitation	Child criminal exploitation	Pre-mset screening	Full mset	Intel submissions into the Police exploitation hub
Jul 22 – Jun 23	62	25	24	27	13	209

- 20 Its worthy of note that some young people can be subjected to both sexual and criminal exploitation.

Review of Contextual Safeguarding within Gateshead Childrens services

- 21 Safeguarding Level 1 – is an approach that focuses on understanding and responding to young people’s experiences of harm beyond their families, either from adults or other young people.
- 22 Safeguarding Level 2 – is an approach to safeguarding of places and spaces in the context of either groups of young people being harmed and or locations where harm outside the home is taking place. The approach seeks to understand the contexts by working in partnership with community guardians and increase safety in identified hot spots.

What’s working well in Gateshead

- 23 Safeguarding Level 1 – Gateshead Safeguarding Partnership have an agreed framework, Missing, slavery, exploitation and Trafficked (MSET) to provide an effective response to vulnerable young people who are at increased risk of all forms of child exploitation. The framework includes a screening and identification tool to support anyone working with a young person in Gateshead to identify risk in the context of exploitation. Depending on the outcome of screening, an exploitation assessment is completed by the young person’s social worker and discussed at MSET Multi-agency disruption and

safeguarding plans implemented and regularly reviewed either within young person's care planning arrangements led by children's social care (CSC) or if high risk or victim of exploitation young person's plan reviewed within MSET.

- 24 The complex child in need team was developed and launched in January 2018 with a focus on young people with complex issues and supporting young people on the edge of care. The team was renamed in 2023 to the Contextual safeguarding Team. The majority of cases of adolescent harm outside of harm outside the home are managed under child in need within the Contextual safeguarding team, and the Social Workers have a good understanding of their role and starting to develop specialist skills in assessing all forms of child exploitation.
- 25 In Nov 2022 funding for 2 years was secured for a young woman and girls intervention worker to provide intensive support to young woman and girls involved in exploitation or gangs.
- 26 The contextual safeguarding team is working in partnership with other local authorities and police across the region to create cross boundary map and intel gathering for a group of young people involved in a gang. (on-going police operation)
- 27 The interface and partnership working in relation to the contextual safeguarding team is good, and this is evidenced in young people's electronic records and the relationship-based practice with families, in meetings and team around the family arrangements.
- 28 Gateshead children's services has representation at regional and national contextual safeguarding forums and have been part of consultations and research to develop the national guiding principles.

What we are worried about

- 29 There is currently no central function or responsible team in children's services to provide specialist oversight of young people who do not meet the criteria for MSET multiagency oversight, who may be open to children in our care teams as an example to help develop contextual safeguarding disruption plan or prevent young people who are vulnerable to exploitation to build their awareness and resilience and prevent them becoming victims.

Future Developments

- 30 Future Developments include:
 - Develop the Contextual Safeguarding – level 2 offer, in partnership with Community safety and Edge North east.
 - Develop robust systems to record, track and monitor all young people who are at risk of contextual safeguarding issues.
 - Develop a toolkit and consultancy offer to social workers and lead practitioners across children's services to ensure all young people and

their families get a consistent offer of support where there are concerns about child exploitation.

- Develop a framework to provide independent oversight of young people who are victims of harm outside the home with IRO service and safeguarding partners.

Recommendations

31 Families OSC are recommended to:

- (a) Note the contents of the report.

Consultees:

The following officers have been consulted on the preparation of this report:

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Sarah Hutchinson

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