

# Annual Missing Children Report for Corporate Parenting Panel

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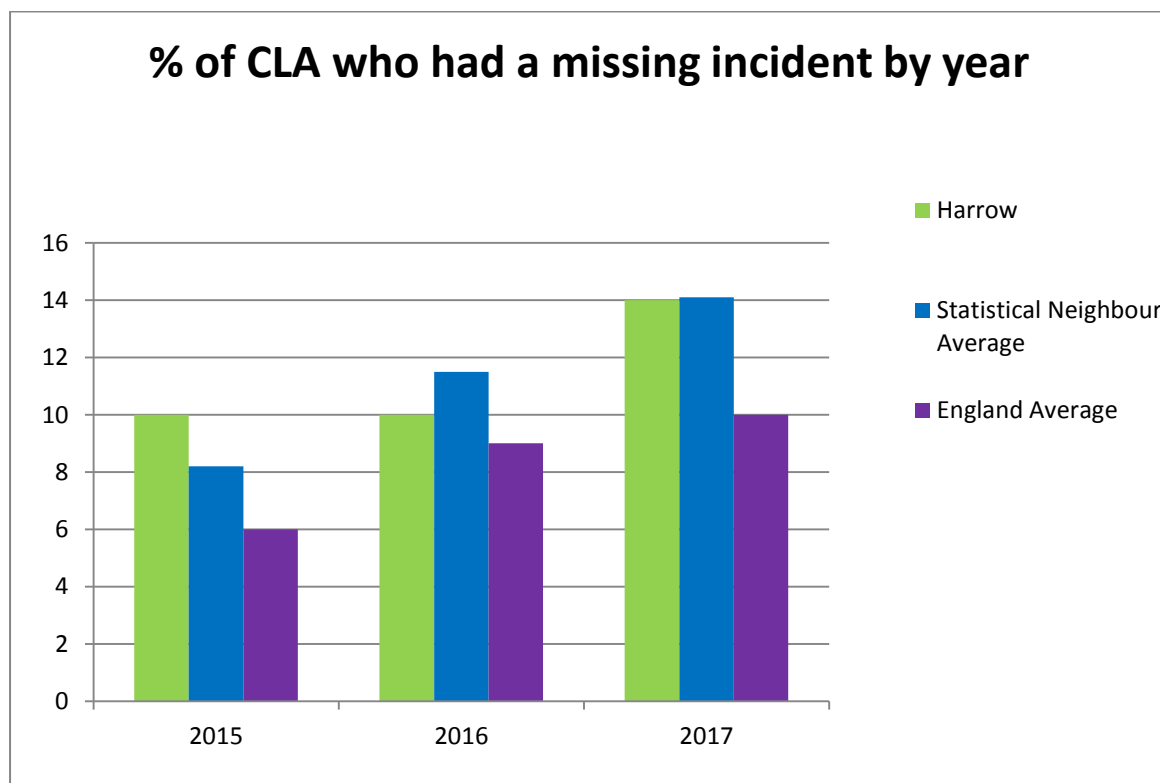
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## Introduction

Harrow Children and Young People's Services has a robust and responsive approach to tackling the complex issues associated with children missing from care. This report provides a summary of missing and absent episodes for Harrow Children Looked-After (CLA) for the period between April 2017- March 2018. This report is informed by data captured in the Children's information database (Mosaic) and the weekly Missing Children Review. Key findings are presented regarding the current Harrow missing children profile, intervention strategies and practice observations.

## Outline of children missing from care

The percentage of Harrow Children Looked-After who had a missing episode has increased from 10% in 2015 and 2016 to 14% in 2017. This is part of a national upwards trend in the percentage of children looked-after going missing. In line with this increase in missing children looked-after, there has also been an increase in the complexity of issues and risks for missing children, particularly in relation to sexual and criminal exploitation.



## Recorded missing from care – number of episodes and number of children

<b>Total Number of Missing from Care Episodes = 178</b>			
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child (UASC) CLA = 2 (4.6%)		Local CLA = 42 (95.4%)	
Male	Female	Male	Female
7 (100%)	0	78 (45.6%)	93 (54.4%)
<b>Total Number of Children with a Missing from Care Episode n = 44</b>			
UASC CLA = 2 (4.6%)		Local CLA = 42 (95.4%)	
Male	Female	Male	Female
2 (100%)	0	21 (50%)	21 (50%)

The vast majority (95.4%) of the 178 recorded missing from care episodes relate to Local CLA. The 178 missing from care episodes relate to 44 individual CLA. The majority of missing CLA are local children, and there is an equal number of male and female local children with one or more missing episodes. Of the 178 recorded episodes of children missing from care, the majority (64%) relate to children missing for 24 hours or less. However, a number of missing episodes lasted for extended periods of time, including a week or more. Children may be at risk of harm or experience actual harm during any missing episode, however we are particularly concerned for children who are missing for more than 24 hours, and children who repeatedly go missing. The following table outlines the recorded duration of missing from care episodes.

### Duration of Missing from Care Episodes

<b>Duration of Absence</b>	<b>Number of episodes</b>
Less than 24 hours	10
1 day/ overnight	104
2 days	17
3 days	15
4 days	7
5 days	6
6 days	4
1 week – 2 weeks	5
2 weeks - 1 month	3
One month +	2
Missing date information	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>178</b>

There are ten (10) children, ranging in age from 14-17 years, who account for more than half (54%) of all missing from care episodes. These children are particularly at risk, and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and child criminal exploitation in the form of being groomed into County Lines “drug running” have been identified for a number of these young people. Intensive support, including therapeutic placements and counselling services, as well as multiagency working across police, education, Health, the Youth Offending Team and Community Safety is in place for these young people.

<b>Children with repeat missing episodes: Top most frequently missing children</b>				
Number of Episodes	Gender	Age	Case Status	Ethnicity
20	Male	17	CLA	Mixed background
12	Male	16	CLA	Black or Black British
12	Female	17	CLA	White or White British
10	Female	14	CLA	Other Ethnic background
10	Female	16	CLA	White or White British
10	Female	15	CLA	White or White British
9	Female	14	CLA	Black or Black British
9	Female	16	CLA	White or White British
7	Male	17	CLA	Mixed background
7	Female	17	CLA	White or White British

The majority of these young people’s missing episodes and return home interviews reveal similar themes:

- Staying out with friends or staying overnight with family members
- Being at risk of CSE
- Being exploited for “county lines” drug running outside of London
- Cannabis, cocaine and alcohol use
- Leaving education (not in education, employment or training – NEET) or poor educational attendance
- Feeling rejected by parents

### **Efforts taken to locate missing children**

Whenever a child is missing from their placement, the foster carer or placement provider will notify the police and the child’s social worker. Our practice is to proactively share “grab packs” with the police (which contains key information about a child and their photograph) for children who are at high risk of going missing. This supports police to locate missing children as soon as possible, rather than waiting for a strategy meeting to take place.

Following initial discussions between the child’s social worker and the police, an immediate strategy for locating the child and an action plan is enacted to ensure the safe return of the child. This includes attempting to contact the child and their known relatives and friends on a

daily basis, visiting their parents' address/es and of any friends or relatives with whom they may be staying; and considering a trace on the child's mobile phone, social media accounts and/or oyster card.

Harrow has a strong multi-agency partnership in relation to missing children, and within 72 hours of child going missing, a strategy meeting is held by the social worker with police, the child's placement and other relevant partners who can assist in locating the child to review the action plan and share information. Any publicity is led by the Police, and the use of harbouring notices, Child Abduction Warning Notices (CAWNs) and Recovery Orders are also considered at the strategy meeting. In addition, the Missing Children Coordinator will utilise their relationship with a missing child and attempt contact with them in order to persuade them to return to a place of safety.

### **Services and Interventions**

The Missing Children Coordinator provides a Return Home Interview (RHI) service to every child missing from Care. In a small number of cases, children may go missing again before a RHI is carried out. For the April 2017- March 2018 period:

- 129 RHI were offered following 178 missing episodes;
- 89 RHI were completed
- 75.3% RHI were completed within 72 hours

In addition, we recognise that children who are absent from their placements may also be vulnerable to the same risks as missing children. Where there are concerns about the vulnerability and safety of children absent from care, RHI interviews are also offered. For the April 2017- March 2018 period:

- 138 RHI were offered following 154 absent episodes
- 23 RHI were completed
- 82.6% RHI were completed within 72 hours

Missing children who are believed to be at risk of County Lines are also referred to the Compass County Lines specialist worker for additional support.

### **Missing Children Weekly Review**

Missing and Absent Children are reviewed weekly on a Monday morning by Heads of Service, the Assistant Director, the VVE Team Manager and the Missing Children's Coordinator. This panel provides strategic oversight on work around missing and absent children in Harrow, particularly high risk missing and absent children. Each week the panel reviews the analysis of return interviews, and some emerging themes and patterns include: missing episodes linked to Child Sexual Exploitation; County Lines/Child Criminal Exploitation; children returning to family homes (unauthorised absences); and emotional, mental health and substance misuse needs.

### **Summary and conclusions**

In recent years there has been an increase in the percentage and complexity of Harrow children looked-after going missing. Ten young people account for more than half of all missing episodes, and these young people are particularly at risk of sexual and criminal

exploitation. Information from return home interviews is valuable in developing a better understanding of the reasons why young people go missing, and these interviews are offered to children who are missing and absent from care. We have a strong multi-agency partnership and responsive approach to missing children, and a range of support and disruption measures are utilised to identify and safeguard missing children. Child criminal exploitation for the purposes of “county lines” drug running is becoming an emerging issue for children in Harrow, as well as nationally. The emerging issue of “county lines” is now being explored and addressed in daily Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation briefings, the HSCB VVE Subgroup and via the Multiagency Sexual Exploitation Panel.