



HM Government

A commitment from
The Children's Plan

Young Runaways Action Plan



department for
children, schools and families

Ministerial Foreword



A young person might run away from home or care for various reasons but when they do so, it usually means that something in their life isn't going right.

In *Every Child Matters*, we set out our ambitions for children and young people: we want all them to enjoy happy, healthy and safe childhoods that prepare them for adult life. Children and young people who run are likely to be unhappy; they might be unhealthy, for various reasons; and, if they end up with adults who are seeking to exploit them, or homeless, they won't be safe.

We know from the evidence set out in the Children's Society *Stepping Up* report, and the findings of a series of parliamentary hearings led by Helen Southworth MP and other members of the **All Party Parliamentary Group for Children who Runaway or Go Missing**, that we need to do more to support young people in this vulnerable position.

This plan sets out what we are going to do from now on to make change happen. It draws on recommendations made in the Children's Society and parliamentary panel reports, and reflects the direction set by the working group I established in January this year.

First, I want young people to get the help they need to sort out issues in their lives which make them want to run away. But, secondly, recognising that some young people will still run away, I want to make sure there are services which can go into action quickly to support them and keep them safe.

People across Government and our partners have been central in developing this action plan. That includes the voluntary sector and the English Coalition for Runaway Children in particular. I would like to thank everyone involved for their efforts and their expertise. Special thanks must also go to **Helen Southworth MP and members of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Children who Runaway or Go Missing for their passionate pursuit of better services for young runaways.**

I look forward to working with our partners over the coming months as we act on this plan and start to improve life for children and young people who, sadly, see running away as their only option. Having seen the energy and commitment of the people who work in this field, I'm optimistic that we can do that.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin Brennan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kevin Brennan MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for
Children, Young People and Families

Vernon Coaker, Parliamentary under Secretary of State, Home Office

There is a need for a clear approach to address the problem of children and young people running away from home or care, from situations of exploitation, or following their trafficking from overseas or internally across the United Kingdom. I fully support the basic principle that everyone has a responsibility to safeguard the vulnerable in our society. That is why the Government is assisting the key organisations involved in this work in order to help them respond effectively when young people run away. This action plan seeks to do just that.

Any strategy must make a real difference, from tackling the causes of running away to agreeing solutions and improving services, protection and support to this most vulnerable group of young people. The Government's Young Runaways Action Plan underlines our commitment to ensuring improved support to those who run away. I look forward to seeing how this action plan will work in practice, but without the contribution of everyone involved, there will be shortcomings in our response that will not be in the best interests of these young people who need our support.

I wholeheartedly endorse this action plan.

Iain Wright, Parliamentary under Secretary of State, CLG

This action plan is crucial to tackling the problem of young runaways and I very much welcome its publication. The case for action is clear and it is essential that Government, local delivery agencies and the voluntary sector work together to put in place those services that will prevent young runaways coming to harm and provide them with the support they need.

Together with DCSF and the Home Office, we believe that addressing the causes of running away is key. We know that those children and young people who repeatedly run away are more likely to present as homeless later in life; therefore anything we can do to help stop this from happening is vital. This action plan will help protect these vulnerable young people, so that they too get the chance to enjoy happy and healthy childhoods and to achieve and succeed as they grow up.

Nevertheless, despite our emphasis on addressing the causes of running, young people need safe places to go when they run away, where they will receive the necessary support to address their reasons for leaving home. There are clear links with our shared work on youth homelessness and we will continue to build on this and strengthen joint working between Housing Authorities and Children's Services which recent good practice guidance encouraged.



Introduction

1. In the Children's Plan we said that our overarching aim is for Britain to be the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up. The goals set out in the Children's Plan are underpinned by five key principles:

- Government does not bring up children – parents do – so Government needs to do more to back parents and families.
 - All children have the potential to succeed and should go as far as their talents can take them.
 - Children and young people need to enjoy their childhood as well as grow up prepared for adult life.
 - Services need to be shaped by and responsive to children, young people and families, not designed around professional boundaries.
- It is always better to prevent failure than tackle a crisis later.
2. We know that keeping all children and young people safe is key to their enjoying a happy and healthy childhood, and to helping them achieve and succeed as they grow up. In addition, the Government has a particular responsibility to safeguard the young and vulnerable.¹ Chapter 2 of the Children's Plan – *Safe and Sound* – sets out our vision for making children's safety everyone's responsibility.
3. The Staying Safe Action Plan (*February 2008*) built on the Children's Plan commitments, giving more detail on what we will do to ensure children and young people are safe, and feel safe. The Staying Safe Action Plan is underpinned by a Public Service Agreement to improve children and young people's safety which will drive

¹ Departmental Strategic Objective 2.

forward work in this area and ensure that effectiveness of the policies is monitored at a national level.

4. We made a commitment in the Children's Plan and the Staying Safe Action Plan that we would act to improve services for young runaways. This action plan fulfils that commitment, specifically identifying and addressing the particular needs of young runaways. By that, we mean children and young people up to the age of 18 who run away from home or care, or who feel they have had to leave, and who face the particular range of risks that come from having to find alternative places to stay and means to survive.

5. The Children's Secretary has Cabinet level responsibility for runaways and, led by the Minister with the Safeguarding brief, the DCSF has taken the lead in co-ordinating policy developments across Government to ensure appropriate services are in place to respond to the needs of those who run away.

6. We have worked closely with other Government Departments, key stakeholders and delivery partners, including the police, representatives from local government and children's services, and experts from the voluntary

sector in the development of this action plan, to identify the necessary next steps to bring about long term improvements in response to the needs of young runaways. The actions in this plan seek to build on examples of good practice and set out how we expect services to respond when a young person runs away. In short, we want to kick-start long-term improvements to services for young runaways. The commitments represent the ongoing work across Government to ensure that the needs of young people who run away from home or care are met

The Risks of Running: Why we need to act

7. We know that children and young people run away for a reason. They may be “pushed away” following abuse, bullying, or other factors that make a place unacceptable to live in. Or they might be “pulled away”, wanting to be near friends, or because they’ve been groomed by adults who want to exploit them. Running away should be seen as a clear sign that something is wrong in the child or young person’s life, and that a response must be made quickly and effectively.

8. The Children’s Society *Still Running* surveys produced estimates that around 100,000 young people under the age of 16 run away from home or care each year across the UK. We know that many of these young people stay with friends or family members, but there are some who do not have or who don’t access these support systems, or who are forced to stay in environments that are harmful to their safety and well-being, and so

end up engaging in activities that may put them at risk.

Findings from Still Running

- 52 per cent of young runaways returned to their home or care placement after one night away
- 1 in 6 young runaways sleep rough
- 1 in 12 young runaways are hurt or harmed while they are away

9. The dangers and risks associated with running away are clear and can have both short and long term consequences. In the Every Child Matters framework, we set out five outcomes for all children and young people – running away can impact across all areas of a child or young person’s life, preventing them from achieving these outcomes.

Challenges to ECM outcomes of running away

Be Healthy – drugs/alcohol misuse; mental health issues.

Stay Safe – sleeping rough; sexual exploitation; violence/assault; associated vulnerabilities, such as child trafficking.

Enjoy and Achieve – impact on schooling/attainment; absence and exclusions; impact on developing appropriate relationships with peers.

Make a positive contribution – involvement in crime (begging/stealing to survive).

Achieve economic well-being – life chances/transition to independent living; link to homelessness.

10. Services need to be in place to respond to both triggers and incidents of running quickly and effectively, to address the root causes of running away and to seek to prevent these problems from escalating to prevent young people from coming to harm.

Running away: what needs to be done

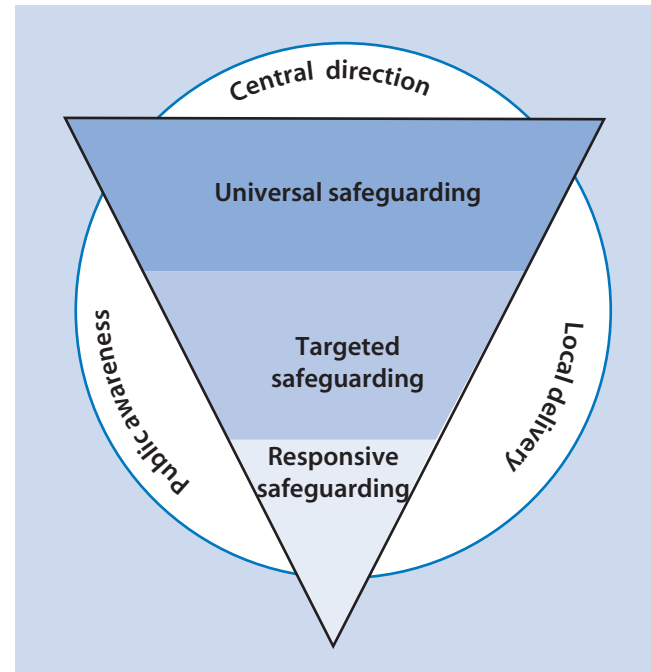
11. Recent developments across the children's agenda have supported the delivery of coordinated, multi-agency responses to vulnerable young people: the Every Child Matters reforms stress the importance of integrated frontline service delivery, with support coordinated around the needs of the child.

12. We've put robust legislation and guidance in place to keep children and young people safe and the Staying Safe action plan builds on these. It sets out actions to plug gaps and co-ordinate work more effectively. It outlines three levels of safeguarding, reflecting the reality that some young people are more at risk of harm than others.

Universal safeguarding – working to keep all children and young people safe and create environments for all children.

Targeted safeguarding – some groups of children are more at risk than others, and it is important to target policies and services to these groups, to help keep them safe from harm.

Responsive safeguarding – unfortunately, no matter what we do, there will always be some children and young people who suffer harm. We need to respond quickly and appropriately when this happens – supporting children and dealing with those who harm them.



13. Improving children and young people’s safety depends on a wide range of people – practitioners, agencies working in partnership, national inspectorates, central and local government and, crucially, parents, and children and young people themselves. The Children Act 2004 set a duty on a range of bodies, including children’s services, health services and the police to have regard to the welfare and safety of children and young people². It also included a

² For the purposes of the Act, a child includes young people up to the age of 18, and in addition, a person aged 18, 19 or 20 who has been looked after by a local authority at any time after attaining the age of 16; or has a learning disability.

requirement for all local authorities to have a Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) in place by April 2006. These LSCBs have now been established in all local areas. They bring together a range of partners to scope and co-ordinate safeguarding services in each area and oversee the safeguarding responses of relevant agencies.

14. Effective multi-agency working is being achieved in local areas around the country by different services working together as teams around the child (TAC), using the Common Assessment Framework and sharing information about children at risk of harm. Tools such as Contact Point will play an important role in facilitating communication and information sharing, supporting early identification of children and young people in need or at risk of harm and enabling professionals to consider jointly how to proceed in the best interests of the child.

15. Furthermore, by the end of 2008, Local Authorities are expected to have in place reformed targeted youth support services, based on effective multi-agency working and common assessment. These will enable early identification,

intervention and support coordinated by a lead professional to meet the needs of vulnerable young people, including those at risk of running away, before their problems reach crisis point.

16. However, we know that there is still more to do: only 12 per cent of those Local Authorities who responded to The Children's Society survey (2007) said that they had services in place to respond specifically to the needs of young runaways.³ Now is the time to drive forward this agenda, to set out clear expectations of what local areas should be doing to meet the needs of those young people who run away, and how the Government can support this.

³ The Children's Society, *Stepping Up* (2007)

Addressing the causes of running away

17. One of the underlying principles of the Children's Plan is that it is always better to prevent failure than to tackle a crisis later. Running away is usually a sign that a crisis point has been reached, and we must therefore do all we can to identify and engage children and young people at risk of running away and inform them about the risks of running away and the services available to support them and their families to resolve issues before they run away.

18. We know from research carried out by voluntary sector partners and from the Social Exclusion Unit report⁴, what the top reasons for running are. Some young people are *pushed* away from their home by factors that make an environment difficult to live in, such as problems at home, including difficult relationships, family breakdown and maltreatment or abuse; problems

at schools including bullying; and personal problems including mental health issues. Other young people are *pulled* away to be near friends and family, or following grooming by adults seeking to exploit them.

19. There are of course already measures in place to address these push and pull factors. Our aim must be to ensure that existing measures fully take into account that running away is a potential outcome for young people who are subject to these factors – and that early action is needed to try to prevent this happening. This plan recognises these measures and builds on them by setting out a number of areas where further action is needed.

4 SEU report, Young Runaways, 2002

Push Factors

Problems at Home

20. Problems at home that may trigger a young person's running away can range from arguments with parents to long-term abuse. We know that there are also some young people who are forced to leave home by their parents or carers, often following arguments and conflict. The Government is committed to strengthening families, and to supporting parents as they bring up their children, so that children are provided with the environment and opportunity they need to fulfil their potential.

Difficult relationships

21. A child's well-being relies on parents and children developing a good relationship with each other. The Government is making additional support available to parents who are finding it hard to support their children, through a number of targeted parenting and family support interventions. The Parenting Early Intervention Programme is being expanded to the majority of local authorities in England, and provides improved support for parents of children aged 8–13 at risk of negative outcomes, which could

include running away, helping them to improve their parenting skills. Parents who have been involved in the programme have reported that they are calmer and more confident in their parenting, giving more time to talking and listening to their children. To provide extra support for families who are finding it hard to deal with their child's behaviour, two expert parenting advisers are also being funded in every local authority to increase access to parenting classes across the country.

22. For the most disadvantaged and challenging families there are 65 Family Intervention Projects which offer the right help and incentives to change their behaviour and provide their children with real life chances. Assertive key workers ensure families engage and pull agencies together to deliver a support package for the whole family. Family Pathfinders are also being introduced in 15 areas, to develop services and systems to improve outcomes for families caught in a cycle of low achievement, including those who are not being effectively engaged and supported by existing services. These will build on FIPs and will develop services that "Think Family".

23. The Parent Know-How programme, worth up to £44 million from 2008–2011, is designed to ensure that parents have access to the information, advice and guidance they need to support them in their parenting role. The programme has a particular focus on meeting the needs of parents, including those of teenage children, who are not as well served by current sources of help as they could be. Parentline Plus, for example, is funded by the Parent Know-How programme to provide helpline and website support on a range of issues for parents and carers including running away, discipline and boundaries and challenging behaviour.

Family Break-up

24. We know that where children and young people are drawn into their parents' conflict they are likely to do less well at school, and more likely to truant or to run away from home. Therefore, the support that parents and the wider family, including grandparents, can provide for the child during family break-up is critical to that child's well-being and success. In the Children's Plan, published last December, we committed to work across government and with organisations such as Cafcass (the Children and Family Court

Advisory and Support Service) to launch work on how better to support parents (including non-resident parents) and their children during and after family breakdown. We are looking to highlight opportunities for universal services, such as schools, to spot warning signs of relationship breakdown early and to signpost support to parents and children at critical moments.

25. Government already funds a range of voluntary organisations providing support to families during and after family breakdown. These include Relate, Coram, Parentline Plus, 2as1, the Family Welfare Association and the National Association of Child Contact Centres. The funding is in the form of strategic grants, to build capacity and infrastructure. **We will explore with these and other third sector organisations the scope for them to address the risks of running away in the services they provide to parents and carers.**

Tackling Maltreatment

26. Safeguarding children and young people is everybody's responsibility; everyone who comes into contact with children and families in their everyday work, including practitioners and their managers, has a duty to safeguard and promote

the welfare of children. The guidance document “What to Do If You’re Worried a Child Is Being Abused⁵” describes what can constitute abuse and neglect and sets out the processes and procedures for reporting concerns about a child who is, or who may be at risk from abuse. The document is frequently used at local level for training purposes as well as a source of day-to-day guidance.

Personal Problems: Mental Health

27. In December 2007 the Secretaries of State for Children and Health announced a joint independent Review of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The main aim of the Review is to investigate how services can be improved to more effectively meet the educational, health and social care needs of children and young people at risk of, or experiencing, mental health problems.

The CAMHS Review will take young runaways into consideration as it investigates how services address the needs of vulnerable children and young people. The Review will publish its final report in autumn 2008.

Problems at school: Bullying

28. We have introduced a programme of work to prevent and tackle all forms of bullying in schools, including prejudice-driven bullying and bullying through text messaging, the internet or other new technologies (cyberbullying). In September 2007 we launched comprehensive guidance entitled ‘Safe to Learn: embedding anti-bullying work in schools’ which includes overarching and specific and tailored advice to schools on how to tackle bullying on the grounds of race, religion and culture; homophobic bullying; the bullying of children with special educational needs and disabilities; and cyberbullying. We have asked the Anti-Bullying Alliance and National Strategies to work with Local Authorities and schools to ensure the guidance is effectively embedded on the ground.

29. We will also be running a number of peer mentoring pilots over the next two years. We know that many pupils prefer to talk to other young people about bullying rather than to go to a teacher or another adult, and these schemes will provide young peer mentors with the necessary skills to help and support other

5 See <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/search/IG00182/>

pupils and, where necessary, to seek the support of a teacher.

30. We will work to ensure that the links between being bullied and running away are considered and addressed as the peer mentoring scheme develops.

31. During our Staying Safe Consultation respondents told us they were unclear about who should be tackling bullying outside of schools. There were also specific concerns raised about bullying of disabled children, children with SEN in the community and homophobic bullying. That is why we announced in the Staying Safe Action Plan a commitment to ‘launch new guidance and training for tackling bullying, including cyberbullying, which takes place outside schools, including in children’s homes, FE colleges, extended school services and youth groups.’ We are currently talking to stakeholders to explore the best approach to providing this guidance and training, which will be launched in the autumn, and which will make links to proposals to support young people who are victims of crime in the Youth Crime Action Plan (to be published in the summer).

Pull Factors

Running to be near friends/family

32. Running away to be nearer friends and family is particularly prevalent where a young person has been placed in a care situation and where there are problems in the contact arrangements with family and friends. Care Matters includes a very wide range of proposals to transform outcomes for looked after children. These proposals are underpinned by Government’s determination to ensure that this very vulnerable group of children are provided with much greater stability and that the child’s voice is heard when planning for their care, so that support takes full account of their wishes and feelings. This is particularly important when considering and planning the contact arrangements with family and friends. There must be a balanced assessment of the risk factors associated with contact and, where contact is in the child or young person’s interests, identified risks must be managed through the care plan. This approach will improve how children are matched to care placements, taking into account their need to have contact with friends and family, thereby enabling them to get the support they need as

soon as they are placed, so that it will be far less likely that they might go missing from care.

33. The Children and Young Persons Bill includes provision requiring that as far as is reasonably consistent with the child's welfare, the local authority ensures that a child's placement allows the child to live near their home; does not disrupt their education; and is within the local authority's area.⁶ This will have the effect of reducing the kind of out-of-authority placements which might not give children with complex and challenging needs the supervision and support they need.

Grooming for potential sexual exploitation and child trafficking

34. In some cases, young people may run away or go missing following grooming by adults who will seek to exploit them sexually. Work of agencies seeking to prevent the sexual exploitation of children shows that 90 per cent of children subjected to sexual grooming go missing at some point. **The Government will be publishing draft guidance on safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation this summer and aims to publish**

the final guidance later this year. The guidance will help local agencies to identify children and young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation and take action to safeguard and promote the welfare of particular children and young people who may be sexually exploited.

35. We know that grooming can take place online, and in April 2006 the Government launched the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) as a national law enforcement agency focusing on tackling the sexual abuse of children, especially in relation to the internet. CEOP's principal aim is to identify, locate and safeguard children and young people from harm. Their work includes prevention and harm reduction through their information, education and awareness raising work in schools and through other channels. Since its launch in 2006, 1.7 million children and young people have seen their 'Thinkuknow' education programme.

36. The child victims' chapter of the UK Action Plan on Tackling Human Trafficking⁷ (March 2007) contains a number of detailed actions to assist in the safeguarding of trafficked children. Many

⁶ Revising s23 of the Children 1989

⁷ See <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/human-traffick-action-plan>

developments have since been implemented. Child trafficking has been incorporated in the cross-government Staying Safe Action Plan, and trafficking sub-groups have been established in a number of authorities at local level and in some cases at regional level under the umbrella of LSCBs.

37. In December 2007, the Government published best practice guidance to assist professionals and others to work effectively to identify and protect children and young people from their traffickers.⁸ Other measures include the introduction of new global visa regulations in February 2006 to ensure that children entering the UK are recorded and complying with the stated reason for their visit. The training of UK Border Agency staff at ports of entry and asylum screening units in the UK to better identify trafficked children has helped to raise awareness. The UK Action Plan on Tackling Human Trafficking now has a number of added actions, one of which is to develop a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for children – an identification/referral process and risk assessment tool to determine whether there are reasonable grounds that a child has been trafficked. CEOP

and the Home Office are currently leading the development of work to establish a process of identification and referral of child victims.

38. The trafficking action plan also includes work to address the issues relating to the internal trafficking of girls resident in the UK. The victims are mostly young girls, being groomed by older males over a period of time, coercing them into sex work, and then trafficking them around the country as a commodity for sexual exploitation. A multi-agency internal trafficking working group led by the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) was established in May 2007. It aims to raise awareness amongst police, professional, statutory agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In addition, the Home Office has provided financial support for an awareness raising film to alert children and young people to the risks of this form of sexual exploitation. The Home Office has also commissioned the University of Bedfordshire to undertake a piece of work on the effective investigation and prosecution of child exploitation offences. This will include consideration of the range of issues facing victims

⁸ See <http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/operational-policing/safeguard-children-trafficking>

of child exploitation, including those who may be young runaways.

Early Identification of at-risk young people

39. Running away, like many other negative outcomes, can result from and lead to other problems such as homelessness and missing education. It is vital that the risk factors associated with running away are given the prominence they need by local authorities and partners when identifying potentially vulnerable young people, to ensure that appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place.

40. Under the targeted youth support arrangements, which should be in place in all local areas by the end of 2008, local authorities and partner agencies are expected to provide coordinated services that work together to identify vulnerable young people in need of support early on and to effectively assess and respond to their broader needs. As local Children's Trusts are leading the development and implementation of targeted youth support services, to support early identification and intervention for vulnerable young people, they should consider ways of identifying those young people at risk of running, and the services they

have in place to support young runaways. They should recognise that many young runaways will be disengaged from universal services.

The Youth Taskforce will support local authorities to meet the needs of young runaways through targeted youth support arrangements by, for example, working with the Training and Development Agency to produce and disseminate case study material illustrating effective multi-agency interventions for young people who are at risk of running, or who have run away.

Informing and Preventing

41. As well as acting to address the causes of running away, we must educate young people about the dangers of running and encourage them to seek support rather than run away: some children run because they feel there is no other option. Children and young people need to know where they can access help if they are thinking of running away, and what alternatives are open to them. Universal services working with young people, including schools and youth centres, are well placed to advise young people about the dangers of running away, and to point them to available support. **We will develop a set of**

resources to be used with young people in schools, Pupil Referral Units and youth/ children's centres, working with colleagues across Government and from the voluntary sector. These resources will provide the information and materials necessary to raise young people's awareness of the risks related to running away, exploring factors that can put young people at risk of running, such as bullying, or inappropriate relationships with adults. These resources will be available to be piloted from January 2009. We will evaluate the outcomes of using these resources as they are adopted to determine how effectively it raises young people's awareness of the risks of running, and the alternative support services that are available.

Responding to those who run away

42. As well as having services in place to resolve issues that can lead to running away before a child runs it is also essential to have effective services in place to respond to those who do run. Running away is a sign that something is wrong at home – in some cases, children and young people will be running to escape danger or abuse. So, a swift and effective response which addresses the young person’s immediate and broader needs is crucial.

43. While there is significant diversity in characteristics of those who run away, and each individual child will have specific needs that must be addressed, there are core services and approaches that can be put in place to offer support to children and young people before, during and after an incident of them running away.

44. Local authorities have the responsibility to respond to the needs of young runaways, as part of their broader responsibilities to safeguard vulnerable young people. They may work with partner organisations, including voluntary sector organisations, through the Children’s Trust, to fulfil these responsibilities.

45. Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) have been established to bring together partners to ensure there are services in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. It is the LSCB’s role to co-ordinate and ensure the effectiveness of what their member organisations do individually and together to effectively safeguard the children and young people in the area of their authority.

46. The local area’s response to young runaways will need to be set in the local context – it should be built in to plans for safeguarding and youth

homelessness prevention, and should draw upon existing support services for young people including, where appropriate, those offered by voluntary sector organisations in the area. Young people's views and experiences should be considered as local responses are developed.

47. Working with Government Offices, we will support Local Safeguarding Children Board's to evaluate running away as a risk, and to put in place action plans for agencies to keep young runaways safe.

Data collection to inform service provision

48. Collecting the right data at local level is essential to driving improvements in services for young runaways. That is why we have introduced a new indicator in the National Indicator Set about children and young people who run away from home or care.

49. This indicator will help to secure effective joint working between children's services, the police and other local partners to ensure that necessary data about young runaways is collected. It will allow local strategic partnerships and children's trusts to begin to establish the scale of problem in their local area, to put services in place to

respond accordingly, and to establish local targets if appropriate.

50. The new indicator (NI 71) will be included in the NIS from April 2009. **We will monitor the data collected for the indicator on a quarterly basis, and will review the indicator in 2009-10, to ensure that it is driving better collections of data about young runaways, and improvements in local services for young runaways.**

Emergency Interventions: Knowing where to turn

51. When a young person does run, services need to be in place that can respond immediately to his or her needs. Young runaways need to know who they can turn to for confidential advice and practical help, if they don't feel that they have friends or family who can support them. Voluntary sector organisations play a key role in offering this emergency response. Local areas should work with voluntary sector partners in the planning and provision of services for young runaways, to maximise their full potential in meeting the needs of vulnerable young people.

52. Helplines offer a clear source of support to young people who have run away, particularly for those who run “out of hours”. In 2007/08, the Runaway Helpline operated by the charity Missing People, received more than 68,000 calls from young people seeking help. **We recognise the role of telephone helplines as a means of support for young runaways. The National Policing Improvement Agency will consider how to ensure the sustainability and positive impact of the Missing People Runaway Helpline.** The Government is also investing £30 million to support the NSPCC in expanding and modernising their listening services.

53. Parents/carers also need to know how they can access help when a child runs. We will seek to encourage parents/carers to report incidents of running away to the police, and emphasise the need to do so quickly in order to effectively safeguard the child. Currently only around a third of young people who run away are reported to the police and it is the large majority who are not reported who are most at risk. **Government and the NPIA will promote the role of the police in safeguarding children who run away, championing the need for appropriate**

reporting to the police when a child goes missing.

Emergency accommodation

54. There need to be safe places for young people to go when they run away, where they will receive the support they need to address their reasons for running. Wherever possible, mediation services should be employed to help young people to return to their home or care placement rather than stay in emergency accommodation. However we know that in some circumstances it will not be possible for the child to return home – if they have run away to escape harm, or if they were forced to leave, for example. In these circumstances, children’s services have a responsibility to accommodate the child or young person.⁹ Additionally, those running away from care may sometimes need a safe place to go while a re-assessment of their need can be undertaken.

55. A review of existing research on emergency accommodation for young runaways is under way, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of current emergency accommodation models. However, we recognise that we will need to do

9 Children Act s 17 & 20

more to support local authority children's services in their provision of emergency accommodation. In particular, we'll need to help them identify successful and cost effective commissioning models using services provided by the voluntary sector, and to understand more about young people's perceptions of different emergency accommodation models. **We will support the development of local, regional and sub-regional commissioning and provision of emergency accommodation following consultation with local authorities on the successful provision of emergency accommodation for young runaways, by autumn 2008.**

56. A 16 or 17 year old who has run away from home and is not able to return could also approach the local authority's housing service for assistance under homelessness legislation. Whether emergency accommodation is provided by children's services or housing services, it must be appropriate for a young person, with support in place. Housing Services and Children's Services are expected to adopt a shared strategic approach to the provision of emergency

accommodation and housing support pathways for young people in order to eradicate the use of unsuitable emergency accommodation, such as bed & breakfast accommodation.

57. DCSF and CLG will continue to work closely together to prevent and tackle youth homelessness, and to support vulnerable young people who are living independently. The recently published guidance, *Joint Working between Housing and Children's Services*¹⁰, sets out the key principles that need to be implemented.

Other Interventions

58. Services put in place to respond to young runaways will need to address a broad range of needs, and draw upon the expertise of several bodies, including the police, children's services, housing services and voluntary sector services. The Social Exclusion Unit's Report (2002) on young runaways, and the Department of Health *Missing from Care and Home Guidance* (2002) which was issued alongside it, set out sound core principles for meeting the needs of those young people who run away from home or care, highlighting the need for a multi-agency response. However

¹⁰ Can be found on the CLG website

this guidance now needs updating to reflect development across the safeguarding children agenda. **We will review the *Missing from Care and Home Guidance (2002)* by Spring 2009 to set out clear roles and responsibilities in responding to young people who have run away from home or care.**

59. In reviewing the guidance we will consult with key stakeholders, including young people, to identify effective responses to running away, the levers that can be used to influence local authorities to implement the principles in the guidance, and the support that we can offer to local authorities to help them to do so effectively. The guidance will particularly address the following issues:

- Roles and responsibilities in a multi-agency response, within and across LA borders, including the role the voluntary sector can play in providing non-statutory services to children running away from home.
- The need for local and regional protocols to be in place – especially for out of hours referrals.
- The importance of a full needs assessment/welfare interview – such as the Common Assessment Framework – for young people

who have run away, so that their broader needs can be identified and addressed.

- Recommended characteristics of and standards for provision of effective emergency accommodation, drawing on the findings of the emergency accommodation review.
- Practices and procedures for gathering information on running away in an area, to support the new national indicator and to inform local practice.

60. In order to support the effective implementation of the guidance, we will identify and distribute good practice examples to demonstrate effective interventions with young people who have run away. We will also develop a self-assessment tool for local authorities, drawing on the principles identified in the good practice examples. **The reviewed *Missing from Care and Home Guidance* will provide local authorities with a resource that supports good practice in working with young runaways and enable children's services to conduct self assessments by summer 2009.**

61. The guidance will draw out the particular requirements related to responding to children who go missing from care. While we know that

children who run away from care are overrepresented in missing persons statistics, they remain a significant group – particularly when incidents of running are considered. Children who run away from care often develop the habit of running and do so repeatedly, either alone or with peers. Children in care can also be targeted by those wishing to abuse and sexually exploit them and encouraging these children to run in order to disrupt their placement is often part of this abuse. Local authorities have particular responsibilities to children in care which must be met. Where there is a possibility that looked after children may go missing from their care placement we expect plans for their care to include strategies to minimise this possibility. The guidance will include advice on how to develop these. The guidance will also include more advice and guidance about managing the care of particularly vulnerable groups of children – such as unaccompanied asylum seekers who may have been trafficked into the UK.

62. However, the guidance must serve to safeguard **all** runaways and to redress the imbalance that currently exists between services offered to runaways from the looked after population and those who run from home,

recognising that all young people who run away are at risk, wherever they have run from.

63. We will ensure that the guidance makes links to other related guidance, such as the guidance on children and young people missing from education; guidance on dealing with trafficking; and guidance on dealing with sexual exploitation. We will make sure that these issues are not dealt with in isolation, and that common risk factors are identified.

Working with the police

64. Children and young people who go missing are in need of targeted and (in some instances) responsive safeguarding. Children and young people can go missing for a range of reasons – from getting lost while out with family or friends at one end of the spectrum, to running away for short periods of time or, at the other end of the spectrum, as a result of abduction or trafficking. The levels of risk associated with each of these scenarios vary significantly, but an appropriate response to ensure the safety of the child is called for in all cases. We are working closely with colleagues in the Home Office, and with the police, via the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and the National Policing Improvement

Agency's new Missing Persons Bureau to identify ways of safeguarding all children and young people who go missing.

65. The Missing Persons Bureau acts as an exchange for information connected with the search for missing people, including those who are suspected to have run away. The Bureau designs guidance for police forces and seeks to co-ordinate consistent policing activity in the search for missing people. It is well placed to act as the centre of expertise and as a hub for the sharing of good practice in relation to missing people. The Bureau is a key member of the Missing Persons Strategic Oversight Group, which is chaired by the ACPO lead for missing persons and attended by relevant government departments, NGOs and the police.

66. We will work with the Home Office, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and the NPIA to ensure the needs of young runaways are addressed as the role and scope of the new Bureau is developed.

67. The Bureau is responsible for the production of guidance to police forces on behalf of ACPO. The current Guidance on the Management Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons

(2005) now needs revision and consultation on new content, style and format is under way.

Revised guidance will be published in 2009.

68. To secure immediate improvements in the response to reports of missing children, **key elements of the guidance will be refreshed during 2008, including:**

- **risk assessment processes** – to develop a multi-agency approach to risk assessment.
- revised **data collection methodologies** to support the production of strategic assessments of the missing person phenomenon in the UK, including chapters on missing children and young runaways.
- revised **'return home' interview guidance** ensuring wherever possible that these return interviews are conducted jointly with Children's Services and the information obtained is shared with relevant agencies.

69. To ensure compliance with the guidance, **NPIA will engage with ACPO and report to ministers on the need for elements of the guidance to be given statutory status as a police code of practice by end 2008.**

70. The Bureau works with a number of policing agencies connected with protecting children (for example, CEOP, SOCA, UKHTC and Interpol). The Bureau shares its knowledge with police forces and partner agencies to prevent adults taking advantage of vulnerable young people, **and will work to ensure that the vulnerabilities of young runaways are recognised and considered by these other agencies.**

71. We want to be sure that the actions set out in this plan will improve services offered to young people who run away from home or care. We have consulted key stakeholders on the content of this plan, and will continue to work with them as the actions are implemented.

72. This action plan demonstrates the Government's commitment to improving services for young runaways and seeks to bring about improvements in services for young runaways at the local level. The steps set out in this plan are intended to catalyse long term change, driven by the responsibility to respond to the needs of vulnerable young people, including those who run away.

Conclusion and Evaluation

73. At a local level, progress will be monitored through the **National Indicator Set for Local Government** (the NIS). The 198 indicators in the NIS cover central government's top national priorities for local government and its partners, and NI 71 deals specifically with running away, while some of the other indicators cover factors that may lead to running away, such as bullying. All NIS indicators will be monitored, and where they have been selected to be designated local improvement targets in the Local Area Agreement (LAA) for that LA the target will be actively performance managed by central government. If an indicator that has not been selected to be a designated target is shown, through the general monitoring process, to be a cause of concern it may become a designated target following negotiations between the GO and the LA as part of the LAA review.

74. Progress against all the national indicators, for each local authority area, will also be reported annually by the Audit Commission as part of the new multi-inspectorate comprehensive area assessment. This assessment will also identify risks to delivery of outcomes in the area, as well as an organisational assessment of the local authority's direction of travel and use of resources. Should prospects be poor or uncertain, inspectorates may propose an inspection to diagnose problems and make recommendations for improvement.

75. The Bureau will ask Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) to conduct a follow up review to the 2007 HMIC report 'Protecting Vulnerable People – Missing Persons'. This review would cover the broader 'missing' issues and include an evaluation of the police response to runaways.

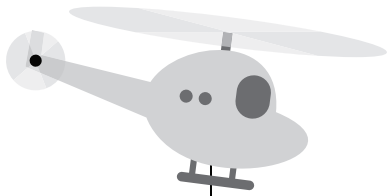
76. At a national level, the indicator on children who have runaway from home or care overnight underpins the DCSF's Departmental Strategic Objective to "Safeguard the young and vulnerable" and progress will be monitored through the Department's business planning and governance arrangements. The indicator also supports delivery of cross government Public Service Agreements to "Improve children and young people's safety" (PSA 13) and to "Increase the number of children and young people on the path to success" (PSA 14).

77. The cross-Departmental PSA Board established to oversee PSA 13 will be responsible for monitoring the impact of actions set out in the Staying Safe Action Plan, including policies to help young runaways, taking corrective action or escalating issues to Ministers as necessary. The Child Safety PSA Board will follow developments of activities relating to young runaways, and to other groups of missing children. It will include representatives from:

- the Department for Children, Schools and Families
- the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills

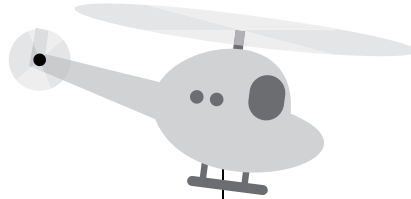
- the Home Office
- the Ministry of Justice
- the Department for Communities and Local Government
- The Department for Culture, Media and Sport
- the Department for Transport
- the Department of Health
- the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit
- Cabinet Office
- Treasury.

78. The cross-Departmental working group for young runaways will also continue to meet, and will drive the delivery and monitor the impact of the actions set out in this plan.



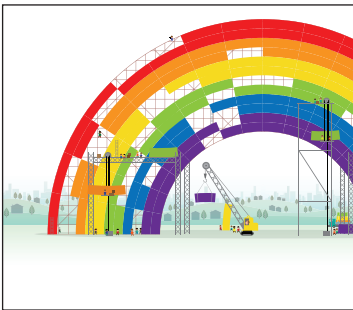
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