the future of runaways services
Stepping Up: The Future of Runaways Services

*a review of services in England, proposing
‘a national safety net for runaways’*

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background

This report builds on existing knowledge about levels of running away. The estimated 100,000 children who run away each year are in varying degrees in need of support and services. Although there is no single profile for a child who runs away, there are common services and approaches that can provide support before, during and after a running away incident. This report seeks to review those services and how far the current policy provisions ensure that every child who runs away is adequately safeguarded.

In 2007 a review of services and responses provided by local authorities and police forces was undertaken. The review consisted of three stages: a set of regional consultations that included social services, police and the voluntary sector and ran as seven road shows in regional cities across England; a national survey of both local authorities and police forces; and finally a national conference to test emerging findings. In all, 32 out of 37 police forces participated in one or more stages of the review and 76 out of 150 local authorities were represented in the review.

Survey and consultation findings

- 40% of police forces are not able to access sufficient data to be able to provide information on levels of need
- Many local authorities have nominated ‘runaways’ or ‘missing’ lead officers, although it was often unclear how the role was defined or deployed
- Half of local authorities surveyed had no protocol for managing cases of children missing from home, however nearly 93% had protocols for children missing from care
- The survey showed that nearly twice as many local authorities fail to plan for the needs of runaways as those that do
- The 2005 Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Guidance on missing persons has had a positive impact on local police force responses to missing children
- 60% of consultees felt that Every Child Matters reforms were helpful
- Most consultees felt that Local Safeguarding Children Board’s (LSCB) should lead on the runaway and missing children issue
- Consultees were supportive of reforms that would lead to the increased use of ‘lead professionals’ and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)
- Just over 12% of all local authorities have services targeted at runaways
- 20 out of 69 local authorities who responded indicated that they had access to emergency accommodation available for runaways in their area
- 10 out of 27 police forces who responded stated that they had young people staying in police stations overnight due to a lack of alternative emergency accommodation
- All but one consultee felt that current commissioning and funding was failing to meet the need
- Local authorities, police and third sector providers all called for renewed guidance
- There was a strong call from consultees for statutory provisions
Analysis of findings

The survey and consultation findings were analysed and highlighted three sets of issues. The first set relate to the people who will need to take responsibility for change, the second related to the position or place of implementation and the third related to the appropriate procedures.

People: issues raised

Local accountability for runaways needs clearly defining and the pathway for responsibility through LSCB and Targeted Youth Support (TYS) arrangements needs clarifying.

Police forces across the country need to be clear about force wide and Basic Command Unit (BCU) level leadership for managing missing persons and the requirements made upon them contained in existing guidance including ACPO 2005 and DH 2002.

Every child reported missing requires an appropriate and where possible independent return welfare interviews recognising the benefits of the practice as a preventative early intervention for children and young people at risk.

Local data is needed to take account of the under reporting of missing children.

Data is best provided in a self reporting format; for example it could be gathered through self reporting surveys that highlight the needs and levels of running away and any instances of risk faced by the children and young people at risk.

The accountability required for a successful renewal of the government’s 2002 commitments to safeguarding young runaways needs leadership at the highest levels.

Places: issues raised

To achieve safe locally accessible services ranging from refuge to outreach services, local authorities need support to identify the best routes through pooled budgets and sub-regional and regional mechanisms to commission services at the appropriate level to meet need.

There is a need for every local authority to detail how young people at risk on the streets can access safe emergency accommodation.

There is a need for a comprehensive review of the full range of accommodation models that are needed regionally, sub-regionally and locally for young people who are at risk and in need of both emergency and longer term accommodation that does not fit within existing provision.

There is a need to provide additional support for local services as they change practices to meet the needs of the most at risk young people. In particular support to embed Every Child Matters (ECM) reforms, including the CAF and the use of trusted adults and lead professionals.

Procedures: issues raised

There is a need for a consistent data standard across English police forces, that provides the appropriate levels of intelligence for national infrastructure bodies (Missing People, Police National Missing Persons Bureaux) and for local Children’s Services to be able to assess levels of need for strategic planning purposes.

There is a need to balance the stated need of local delivery managers to place stronger duties on their authorities to provide services for runaways and the problems of using performance management as a driver for change.

There is a need to ensure that national and local strategic planning delivers local provision for every child who runs away so that they can gain immediate access to the services that they require to stay safe.

There is a need for local authorities to understand and deploy services at appropriate levels to meet different tiers of need where young people are at risk. Appropriate support is needed to ensure that services are delivered at every level across local areas to prevent long-term negative outcomes for young people.
Proposals

The issues were then analysed for possible solutions. The Children’s Society proposes a comprehensive safeguard for young runaways. This sets out how safe people, safe places and safe procedures form a national safety net by providing proposals at every level: national, regional and local.

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The following proposals form key elements of the National Safety Net:

- The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) minister who holds the safeguarding brief is given strategic responsibility for ensuring cross-departmental safeguarding responses to runaways and engages all stakeholders internally and externally
- DCSF to introduce a new indicator related to runaway and missing children within the new performance framework linked to the Safeguarding Public Service Agreement
- DCSF to create a statutory duty for local authorities to ensure that every child who is returned from a missing incident receives a ‘return interview’ to a standard that ensures a proper assessment of need is made in accordance with a pre-common assessment framework process
- Every LSCB appoints a strategic leader for runaway and missing children, which is closely defined by role description
- DCSF with the Department of Health and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) undertake a review of emergency accommodation which addresses a range of issues including: the need for different models for different groups of young people, the status of children who access emergency and breathing space accommodation, the need for parental permission and the thresholds for entry
- Local authorities to set out access criteria and capacity of emergency accommodation provisions including detailing the management of missing children in need of breathing space for welfare assessments
- DCSF to update and revise missing from home and from care guidance ensuring that statutory requirements are specified and clarified and its position harmonised with ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’
- ACPO to issue national police code on data collection and reporting standards required of police forces relating to missing people
- Police forces to ensure that BCU level lead officers are in place and that they embed standards of reporting and monitoring of social services responses to police requests for support

Conclusion

This report sets out a comprehensive review of services for runaways. It poses a set of challenges and provides a set of possible solutions. The report is initially intended for the review of the Department for Children, Schools and Families. A response from DCSF is expected in the autumn.
section 1: context and setting

In this introductory section the report gives a brief overview of developments in research, practice and policy in the UK in relation to young runaways and missing young people over the last two decades.

A significant problem, which will become apparent at various points throughout this report, is that there is a lack of common and clear language for discussing this phenomenon. There have been two separate definitional approaches in the literature on the subject, they are; ‘runaways’ and ‘missing children’:

Runaways

The term ‘runaway’, within UK policy and research to date, has been a term used to describe a young person who describes him/herself as having spent one night or more away from home without parental permission while under the age of 16. This is also the definition used for the purposes of the stakeholder review and this report of its findings. However, the term and its scope do create some problems. Over time, it has gradually broadened from an initial focus on the common understanding of running away as literally fleeing from home, to a recognition that a proportion of young people are forced to leave home rather than acting of their own volition and, more recently, has come to include young people who do not see themselves as having ‘left home’ at all, but are nonetheless staying away overnight without permission. This concept is young person-centred, based on young people’s own descriptions, but the gradual broadening of the definition means that the term ‘running away’ is no longer a very accurate way of describing the wide range of situations which are covered by the concept. Also, it does not include behaviour that a young person might themselves describe as ‘running away’, but that took place during the day time, even though in other respects it may be the same kind of behaviour for similar reasons as those that motivate overnight runaways.

Missing

This second definition focuses on the concept of young people being ‘missing’ from home or care. On the face of it this seems more helpful as it more simply describes the fact that a child’s whereabouts are unknown for a period of time to their primary carer. However, there are two potential problems with adopting this definition in seeking to define and understand young people’s behaviour. Firstly, a child or young person may be ‘missing’ under this definition for an even wider variety of reasons than those covered by the definition of running away. For example, a child who became lost from their supervising adult within a busy shopping street would be defined as ‘missing’ under this definition until they found each other again, while at the other end of the spectrum, a child who had been abducted, injured or even killed while away from their primary carer would also be ‘missing’ until found. The aim of this review of policy and practice, however, is to focus on those children and young people who either decide to be away from home or who are forced to leave home, and face the particular range of risks that come from having to find alternative places to stay and means to survive. Therefore the term ‘missing’ is too broad for this purpose. The second problem is that the term ‘missing’ is easily and usually equated with ‘missing person reports’ where incidents of young people are reported missing to the police by parents and carers. Research evidence from the UK and US, however, suggests that as many as two thirds of
young people who run away are not reported to the police as missing, and even fewer among those who were forced to leave home. Relying on missing person reports, therefore, would lead to a significant underestimating of the scale and nature of the problem.

Discussion

Inevitably, this definitional confusion between ‘running away’ and ‘missing’ creates difficulties for any discussion of practice or policy responses. For example, many of the ‘runaways’ projects established in the UK over the last 10 years have exclusively or primarily worked with young people reported missing (Rees et al, 2005), even though these young people are probably a minority of the total runaways.

As a recent review by PACT (2005) concluded, it is a confusion that needs to be resolved as part of the process of developing practice and policy responses to young people’s needs.

In this report both terms are used although runaways is often used as it encompasses the wider group of young people who would need to access the services reviewed.

Research

In this section the report reviews the available research on running away in the UK. The discussion is restricted to the key points relevant to this report, and readers are referred to Rees & Lee (2005) which provides more detail on many of the key findings.

Prevalence and incidence

The most reliable information on the prevalence of young people running away from home in the UK is provided by two national surveys on the topic conducted by The Children’s Society (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999; Rees & Lee, 2005). Both of these surveys included a sample of over 10,000 young people – the former for the whole of the UK, and the latter for England only. The key finding from both surveys was that around 11% of young people run away from home for at least one night before their 16th birthday. On this basis the surveys estimated that there were around 129,000 incidents of young people running away in the UK each year. It has also been roughly estimated using the same figures that around 100,000 young people run away each year (Rees & Lee 2005).

A number of reports have provided estimates of the total number of incidents of young people reported missing each year in the UK (Newman, 1989; Abrahams & Mungall, 1992; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002 cited in PACT, 2005). Generally these have indicated that there are around 100,000 incidents per year. Because of the way missing person statistics are recorded it is less clear how many young people these incidents relate to, although Abrahams and Mungall estimated this to be around 43,000.

Characteristics

Evidence on the characteristics of runaways from self-reported surveys (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999; Rees & Lee, 2005) indicates that:

- more runaways are female than male
- most running away occurs from the age of 13 onwards
- there are some differences in running away rates according to ethnicity, with young people of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin being less likely than average to run away. ‘No-one asked us
before!’ (Akhtar, 2002) suggests that this group of young people may be reluctant to acknowledge running away because of *izzat* (honour) and that current statistics under-represent the problem.

Recent research has also suggested higher than average running away rates for young people who define themselves as being disabled or as having difficulties with learning; and for those who define themselves as gay or lesbian (Rees & Lee, 2005).

Reasons for running away

Young people’s accounts of reasons for running away focus primarily on problems they are experiencing at home, including poor family relationships, conflict and maltreatment (Rees & Lee, 2005). Some young people also identify personal problems (e.g. depression and pressure) and school problems as triggers for running away.

A significant proportion (around a quarter) of ‘runaways’ define themselves as having been forced to leave home (Rees & Lee, 2005). Detailed analysis of this issue is provided in Rees & Siakeu, 2004.

Context and background to running away

Attention has also been paid to the wider context within which young people run away.

Rates of running away are higher for young people currently living in a step family (18%) and in a lone parent family (13%) than with both birth parents (8%) (Rees & Lee, 2005) – although the incidence of running away may not have occurred within the current family context (Rees & Rutherford, 2001).

There are also significant links between running away and the quality of family relationships, with young runaways tending to report poor quality relationships at home. However, as this evidence is from cross-sectional surveys this should not be taken to imply causality.

Finally, rates are also substantially higher for young people in the ‘looked after’ system (Wade & Biehal, 1998; Rees & Lee, 2005). The evidence suggests that this is true both for residential care and foster care.

Related issues

As well as the above factors in young people’s home environment, strong links have been found between running away and a range of other problems and issues in young people’s lives including truancy, offending, substance use and personal well-being (Rees & Lee, 2005). Because these findings are from snapshot surveys it has not been possible to explore the timing and ordering of the emergence of these issues in young people’s lives.

There is also some evidence of longer-term links between running away and negative outcomes later in life, including youth homelessness (Craig & Hodson, 1998) and adult anti-social behaviour disorder (Utting, Monteiro and Chate, 2007).

Reported missing

Recent research has indicated that, based on young people’s accounts, the majority of running away incidents are not reported missing to the police (Smeaton & Rees, 2004; Rees & Lee, 2005).

Experiences whilst away

Young people’s responses to survey questions indicate that, whilst away from home they are more likely to seek help from informal sources such as friends and relatives rather than ‘helping agencies’.
There is substantial evidence of the risks which young people face whilst away from home:

- Around 16% of young runaways sleep rough whilst away from home
- Around 8% of young runaways say that they were hurt or harmed whilst away
- Around 12% resort to survival strategies such as begging and stealing

Combined estimates (Rees & Lee, 2005) indicate that up to 25% of young runaways will have at least one of the above experiences whilst away.

Using the above findings it is possible to come up with some very rough estimates of the numbers of young runaways who may be at substantial risk and who may require safe accommodation and other intensive support whilst away from home.

- Based on the estimate of 100,000 young people running away each year, it can be seen that somewhere in the region of 20,000 to 25,000 young people in the UK would fall into this category
- If we also include repeat incidents then it can be estimated that, out of the total estimated incidents of 129,000 per year there are up to 32,000 incidents per year which involve a substantial element of risk using the above criteria

There is a wide diversity of running away experiences, ranging from young people who run away for one night and stay with a relative or friend to others who spend many months continuously away from home without support from parents or carers (Smeaton, 2005).

**Repeat incidents**

Most young people who run away only do so once or twice. But some young people run away repeatedly. Repetitive running away is particularly high amongst ‘looked after’ young people (Rees & Lee, 2005).

**Discussion**

Two important themes have emerged in the above research evidence which are of relevance to the subject matter of this report – related to diversity and risk.

First, there is substantial diversity in the characteristics of young people who run away from home and in their experiences whilst away. The former means that it is difficult to confidently predict which young people are ‘at risk’ of running away. The latter means that responses to the issue of running away need to be diverse in order to meet a wide range of contexts and needs.

Second, there has been confusion regarding the conceptualisation of risk in relation to running away. The term ‘risk’ has tended to be used interchangeably and imprecisely to discuss the likelihood of running away, the risks faced whilst away from home, the risks faced if young people return home, and potential longer-term negative outcomes. There has thus been an inappropriate tendency to treat ‘risky experiences’ and ‘at risk groups’ as interchangeable. The danger of this approach is that young people who are not at particularly high risk whilst away receive services purely because of their characteristics, while the needs of other young people who are at higher risk are ignored. There is a need to disentangle this tendency, and clarify how we conceptualise risk in relation to running away, in order to make progress with the reasonable aim of targeting support where it can have greatest impact.

Finally, in this brief review of research developments, it is worth reflecting on the gaps that still remain in our research knowledge in the UK at this stage. The largest gap is that the most substantial research studies have been snapshot surveys. There is a need for more longitudinal research in order to learn
more about the ordering of events and potentially also to more accurately indicate risk factors. There is also a need for further research on highly marginalised young people.

Practice

Overview of practice development

Practice responses to the issue of runaways in the UK have developed in a number of waves over the last two decades:

- An initial set of projects set up by The Children’s Society in the late 1980s and early 1990s consisted of four refuge projects and two streetwork projects
- The second phase of development, during the late 1990s and early part of this decade saw the development of projects undertaking case work with young people, primarily in response to police missing person reports
- The scope of the practice base extended with funding from the DfES of 20 pilot runaways projects throughout England in 2003 and 2004. These pilot projects had a range of models of service delivery and target groups
- Finally, more recently, the DfES also funded a small number of pilot projects in England to test out different forms of flexible refuge provision

There are currently two organisations providing a total of 9 refuge bed spaces for young people in the UK (in Glasgow and London) some additional projects providing some targeted emergency accommodation for runaways; and a scattering of other specialist non-residential provision in some areas of England.

Evaluation evidence

In contrast to the extensive body of evidence reviewed earlier on running away as a phenomenon, there is relatively little evidence which systematically evaluates the outcomes of interventions with young people who run away. There are only a few published evaluation studies which have attempted to measure outcomes for children and young people. These include one programme evaluation of 19 pilot projects in England funded by the DfES during 2003 and 2004 (Rees et al, 2005) and several single project evaluations (referenced later). There are a larger number of reports which have focused on processes and learning from the setting up and running of runaways projects.

In order to structure the discussion, we will discuss four broad categories of practice-based work – primary prevention; emergency accommodation; other interventions whilst young people are away; and responses to running away / prevention of repeat incidents. We will also summarise general learning about project development and some of the broader debates which have emerged about provision for runaways.

Primary prevention

A number of primary prevention initiatives have been undertaken in the UK mainly through the provision of information and awareness raising in schools and other educational settings. These include schools-based work in Derby (unpublished), Leicestershire and Rutland (Jones, 2006), in addition Missing People has a schools pack that has been available to every secondary school in the country. An information pack for young people in pupil referral units was also developed by Shelter (Gilchrist, 2004).
However, to date, there has been no systematic evaluation of the impact of primary universal prevention [in relation to running away] in the UK. If progress is to be made in this area, then there is a need for well-funded pilot projects with a strong evaluative component in order to indicate whether such initiatives can have an impact on prospective running away rates. Presumably the aim of these initiatives would be diversion through ensuring that young people obtained support with problems rather than just deterrence. Thus it would seem important that primary prevention was combined with accessible targeted support services for young people who may be thinking of running away, so that they could access appropriate help with the problems they were facing. Primary prevention would therefore be one component of a comprehensive safety net.

**Emergency accommodation**

Three different models of emergency accommodation have been tried in the UK – fixed refuge provided at a specific location; a dispersed foster care model; and ‘crash pad’ facilities linked to an existing young people’s project.

To date, of these models, the fixed refuge is the most fully tested. Refuges have been operational for extended periods in London (1985 to present), Leeds (1991 to 2000) and Glasgow (2002 to present) and have been used by substantial numbers of young people (e.g. Malloch, 2006). However, it is argued that the cost per person per night is relatively high. New models are being developed including the Safe At Last refuge development in South Yorkshire where the service is provided within the context of an already funded and fully costed service reducing the passed on costs of overnight stays.

The foster care model has been tried more sporadically in a number of locations including the Porth Project in South Wales and more recently in some of the DCSF-funded pilot flexible accommodation projects. So far the numbers of young people using such projects have been relatively small and so it is difficult to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the model.

Similar remarks apply to the ‘crash pad’ model which has so far only been developed in one location – Torquay – and has been used relatively infrequently.

At this stage, therefore, it is not at all clear what the relative advantages and disadvantages of each model are. In particular, the assumption that the fixed refuge model is more expensive has not been tested or verified. The limited evidence on young people’s views (Smeaton & Rees, 2004) suggests that, hypothetically at least, the fixed refuge model is the most favoured by young people, followed by the foster care model.

However, there is a tendency for the debate around models of emergency accommodation to become polarised, when in fact it is feasible to imagine that different forms of refuge might be most suitable to different geographical locations and different contexts in terms of young people’s characteristics and situations.

Finally it should be noted that whilst some of the projects have operated as refuges under Section 51 of the Children Act 1989, it is not clear that some of the provisions of this section, in particular the ability to accommodate without parental consent, are necessary for most runaways, although they remain critical for a small minority.

**Other forms of help whilst away**

Various other local models of help for young people whilst away from home have also been developed in the UK. Typically these models have provided immediate practical and emotional support; and, where appropriate, support to return home.
In the 1990s two outreach/streetwork projects operated in the city centres of Birmingham and Manchester and were effective in reaching highly marginalised young people. However, the changing nature of city centres has cast doubt on this model (Rees, 2001).

Centre-based models such as Checkpoint in Torquay, where specialist runaways provision has been part of a more generic service, have proved effective as a self-referral route and have successfully reached sub-groups, such as young people forced to leave home, which have tended to be missed by other services (Rees et al, 2005).

Finally, local telephone helplines have been run in several locations - e.g. a pilot out-of-hours service as part of the ASTRA Project in Gloucester in 2003/4 (Gilchrist & Rees, 2004). It would seem that such services are probably not economically viable on a local basis. Instead it may be effective to link local specialist runaways projects with national telephone helplines as proposed in a feasibility study of telephone helplines published in 2003 (Franks et al, 2003).

Response and ongoing prevention

This final category includes immediate response services - typically ‘return home’ interviews – and projects offering longer term case work with the aim of preventing repeat runaway incidents. There is some evidence that ‘return home’ or ‘missing person’ projects may be effective particularly with first-time runaways (Rees et al, 2005). Case work approaches may be particularly suited to repeat runaways, including those ‘looked after’. However there is a risk of such services blurring the boundaries with more mainstream provision for ‘vulnerable’ young people.

Learning about the development of services

The literature on project development contains some commonly occurring themes on setting up services for young runaways (e.g. Rees, 2001; Rees et al, 2005). These include:

- The time taken to establish services. This has been an issue for all services in relation to generating referrals from a range of sources; and in particular for accommodation models in terms of the regulations and checks required for accommodation and staff/carers

- A pattern of short-term funding has led to high turnover of projects and uncertainties which have hampered the stability of service provision. This pattern has also led to missed opportunities in terms of evaluation

- Difficulties in publicising services, leading to a reliance on police missing person reports as a main referral source. Learning from long-established projects (e.g. Leeds Safe House) indicates that many self-referrals can be generated through word-of-mouth recommendation but this takes years to achieve

- The importance of integrating runaways services into the network of local provision for young people. Some of the more successful and long-standing projects have had multi-disciplinary steering groups and a strong sense of joint ownership

Broader debates

The literature on practice developments has also highlighted some broader debates including the relative merits of:

- Independent services versus mainstream provision. Perceived independence has been a key ingredient of projects’ success with young people and families. On the other hand, projects are often drawn into longer-term caseworking, which can blur the distinction between the independent and
mainstream services’ respective roles in supporting children, young people and families

- Specialist or generic services. Specialist runaways services often highlight and key into the needs in a particular local area. However, runaways are not a homogenous group and they face a range of diverse issues - maltreatment, substance use, school problems, offending - which are variously best dealt with by other generic and specialist services

- Local, regional and national services. Most initiatives to date have been local services, in terms of their funding arrangements and in their ‘catchment areas’. However some services are not economically viable at this level - e.g. fixed refuge, telephone helplines, where the nature of service demand and the logistics of providing the service, lead inevitably towards a larger geographical reach. On the other hand regional services (e.g. London refuge) have struggled with funding issues and national services such as telephone helplines are often unable to offer significant practical help in isolation from a network of service to refer callers to. This suggests the need for a coherent and co-ordinated network of services made up of a ‘mixed economy’ of services that operate effectively at at national, regional and local levels

Policy

Section 51 of The Children Act, 1989

The most significant early policy development in relation to runaways was the inclusion of Section 51 in The Children Act 1989. This section made provision for the first time for refuges to provide temporary emergency accommodation for young runaways and other young people away from home without parental consent. This legislation clarified the legal position of the three refuges which were already in operation in the UK at that time, and removed the risk of such refuges being prosecuted under Child Abduction Act 1984 for ‘harbouring’ young people. The Children Act 1989 applied to England and Wales. Similar legislation was passed in Scotland The Children (Scotland) Act 1995.

Social Exclusion Unit reports

Following the publication of the first national survey findings on young runaways in the UK in 1999 (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999) the issue of young runaways was made a priority area for the Social Exclusion Unit. An initial consultation document was published in 2001 (SEU, 2001) and the consultation led to the publication of a report containing guidance and recommendations the following year (SEU, 2002).

Department of Health guidance

Linked to the above development, in the same year the Department of Health published guidance primarily focused on dealing with incidents of ‘looked after’ young people going missing (DoH, 2002). The key recommendations of the guidance are detailed later in this report.

Development of protocols

One of the consequences of the above developments has been the proliferation of local joint protocols between Police, Social Services and other agencies to ensure an effective response to incidents of young people being reported as missing to the police. Progress in this area is reviewed later in the report.
Recent developments related to the Every Child Matters agenda

Recent developments have included the Children Act 2004 and the associated Every Child Matters and Youth Matters changes. This legislation focussed on integrated working to provide better safeguards for young people and to promote the development of Children’s Services within local authority social care. Further analysis of this policy is provided later in this report.
section 2:

national review of services for young runaways – consultations and surveys

Methodology

Methodology of surveys

To provide an up-to-date picture of practice and policy development in relation to runaways in England, The Children’s Society conducted questionnaire-based surveys of all local authorities and police forces in the country. Respondents were given assurances that all responses would contribute to analysis on an un-named basis, so that no information would be released from the survey which would be attributed to specific individuals, authorities or agencies.

The local authority survey

The local authority questionnaire was initially posted to all 150 local authorities in England in December 2006, with an endorsement from the DCSF (then DfES). Where there was a known key contact within an area in relation to runaways the questionnaire was posted directly to that person. For other areas the questionnaire was sent to the Director of Children’s Services or another senior children’s management post.

Follow-up contact with areas who had not responded began in late December 2006 and continued in several waves until April 2007. This took the form of telephone calls, e-mails and a repeat mail-out of the questionnaire.

In view of feedback from the initial round of follow-up contact, a briefer version of the questionnaire, focusing on eight key questions was devised for authorities who felt unable to complete the full questionnaire.

In total, 69 local authorities participated in the survey, representing almost half the local authorities in England. There were some differences in response rates in terms of region and type of area. Response rates were somewhat higher for Unitary Authorities than for Shire Counties and Metropolitan areas. There were higher than average response rates from the North East and East Midlands regions; and lower than average response rates for Inner and Outer London and the East of England region.

A comparison was also carried out of response rates according to whether the local authority area had a known specialist runaways project, based on the information from the report by PACT (2005). With the exception of London, there was a somewhat higher response rate (62%) from areas with a known specialist runaways project than from those without (45%).

The police survey

The police survey was posted out to all 37 police forces at the beginning of March 2007. The survey was accompanied with a letter of endorsement from the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). As with the local authority survey, repeat mailings and follow-up calls were conducted to boost response rates up to the end of May. In total, 27 questionnaires were returned, representing approximately three-quarters of the police forces in England.
Methodology and participation in consultation

In order to ensure that quantitative data was cross-referenced with qualitative responses, The Children’s Society undertook a consultation process to directly engage with local authorities, police forces and voluntary sector organisations across the country. The consultation ran in seven cities across England: London, Leicester, Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle, Birmingham and Plymouth. The cities represented London, the East Midlands, Yorkshire and Humber, the North West, the North East, the West Midlands and the South West. There was insufficient take-up of places in the South East and East of England to make events viable in those regions. This correlates with the areas that also had the lowest rates of response to the surveys.

Over 90 delegates attended from local authority children’s services and health, voluntary sector and police. Most delegates were middle or senior managers including commissioning managers, heads of safeguarding, Police Inspectors and Superintendents. In terms of numbers, attendance was evenly spread across the three sectors.

The events were facilitated to capture information and understanding about levels of need, what is working and what could work differently. Each event comprised the following format:

- Presentation of research information and policy context
- Participative exercise to map out current understanding and provision of services
- Discussion about barriers and facilitators for best practice and meeting need
- Facilitated discussions about recommendations for future actions and policy development
- Direct recommendations developed in consensus

Participative exercises included ‘post it’ continuum’s
Survey and consultation findings

Levels of need

As reviewed in the previous section, through two national surveys of young people conducted by The Children’s Society in 1999 and 2005, there is now a baseline estimate of 100,000 young runaways per annum. Runaways in the two surveys were defined as under-sixteens away from their carer overnight without permission.

In the two surveys undertaken in this report, local authorities and police forces were asked questions about the data that they held. It is important to note that a single police force covers several local authority areas in most instances.

Questions asked:

Do you have a summary of statistics on young people reported as missing to the police in your LA area? (LA Survey – 69 authorities)

Do you have a summary of statistics on young people reported as missing to the police within your area? (Police Survey – 27 Forces)

Both the survey and the associated consultation reported inconsistent recording of missing children data and, in many areas, difficult to access data. Police forces were the primary data custodians and they reported frustrations with data management systems. There is no national system, hence case management and data recording systems vary. Some forces are proactively developing systems in partnership with software providers and in some cases in conjunction with other forces in the country. Even where systems are in place the nature of how a missing person report is generated varies. In some instances missing reports are only entered if a child is missing for longer than four hours, others reported gaps of up to twenty-four hours before data was stored. Several police forces do not have electronic management systems for missing incidents. Where electronic systems are not present the extraction of under-18 specific data is often considered too difficult to undertake.

Analysing the police survey data it was clear that annual rates of ‘missing children’ ranged from 6 to 11 incidents of young people reported missing per 1,000 children and young people in the local population. To provide a very rough estimate - if replicated nationally, the average of these rates would mean around 84,000 incidents reported per year. The Children’s Society research indicates that 68% of children who run away are not reported missing to the police. (Rees & Lee 2005).
Some local authorities had systems in place for recording a variety of missing data from the looked after population, however these systems were disparate and inconsistent. There was no evidence of running away being a focus for local authority data collection.

The local authority survey also asked whether there was other information available in local areas about the prevalence or incidence of running away, apart from missing persons statistics.

Is there data about running away apart from missing persons reports?

23 areas (one-third) indicated that such information was available. However 10 of these areas did not provide any further details and a further nine indicated that the information was only available for looked-after children. Four local authorities said that they had information about runaways in general and cited the source of this information. In three of these four cases the source was the referral statistics of a voluntary sector specialist runaways service.

The survey found that whilst local authorities generally have localised statistical information available to them about missing persons, although not necessarily about young people specifically, there is a widespread lack of information about the overall numbers of young runaways.

Consultation Comment

65% of consultation participants felt that not enough was known about children who run away

“From a Police perspective I am aware of the number of missing reports made to the Police and can highlight repeat individuals. How this information is shared if at all is not known to me”

Key Questions

How can a consistent and accessible data set be ensured from every police force across the country?

How can data on levels of running away, as opposed to children reported as missing, be collected, including on those not reported missing to the police, to support local authority planning?
Impact of current policy and legislation


In order to seek implementation of the core principles of the Social Exclusion Unit’s ‘Young Runaways’ report, Local Authority Circular 17 (2002) was issued under section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 which requires local authorities to act unless there are exceptional circumstances. LAC 17 (2002), issued by the Department of Health asked local authorities and police forces to take the following actions:

- Ensure the guidance is part of the planning process for services to Children and Young People
- Ensure local procedures and protocols are in place for:
  - Carers – foster and residential
  - All looked after children who go missing (multi agency approach)
  - All children missing from home
- Conduct a needs assessment
- Prepare a strategy
- Conduct an annual service review
- Collection and sharing of information
  - Monitoring of data from Foster and Residential placements
- Involvement of primary care trusts (PCT’s) and voluntary community sector (VCS) organisations in service review
- Police assessment of every missing episode for social service referral

The Children’s Society surveys asked three questions relating to the Department of Health Guidance about leadership, protocols and planning.

Leadership

Is there a strategic lead with responsibility for runaways in your area?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of LA respondents (out of 69)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was a mixed understanding amongst consultation delegates about the statutory guidance relating to runaways. The concept of strategic leadership as a key responsibility of local authorities was rarely understood and where it was it had come about as a result of local authority and voluntary sector collaboration, often in the form of Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs).
Protocols

The surveys showed a significant number of authorities and forces had protocols in place to agree inter-agency responses to running away or children who go missing. Consultation delegates also reported progress toward multi-agency protocols, of which the majority covered responses to children missing from care. In the consultation only 18% of delegates recorded any focus on children missing from home.

Both the police and local authority surveys asked the question *Is there a protocol for inter-agency responses to incidents of running away or children missing in your area?*

Responses suggest that the establishment of protocols is now widespread. Protocols had been agreed in 64 out of 69 local authorities and in 23 out of 27 police forces. However, in approximately half of local authorities the protocols only related to ‘looked after’ young people. There were no protocols in place for young people reported missing from family in over half the responding areas. Additionally, there was evidence of a mixed picture of implementation.

Similarly in the 23 police force areas with protocols, there was full implementation reported in seven areas and the protocols were ‘mostly’ implemented in a further eight areas.

Follow-up interviews with local authority respondents suggest that Local Safeguarding Children Boards are now taking on the responsibility for monitoring protocols in many areas.

Planning

In the localities where planning for runaways took place the consultation delegates indicated that any targeted planning was localised, even to a particular town or district within an authority, and often led by a body outside of the local authority. In some areas the police and voluntary sector providers had developed plans to address local or specialised needs. In the best practice case studies submitted for the consultation these were funded by short term funding (usually 12 months) from outside the authority or by special initiative of the police using national or force-wide investment.
Is an action plan produced in your area specific to running away?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of LA respondents (out of 69)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey suggests that nearly twice as many local authorities do not plan for managing runaway incidence than do.

Consultation comments

56% of participants felt that the Department of Health Guidance was ‘not making a difference’ or ‘don’t know’

“Running away from care much more visible statistically and in research”

“Limited implementation of the recommendations some protocols in place but not always followed up”
Other recommendations from the guidance

The local authority questionnaire also asked about implementation of six other recommendations from the guidance. Responses to these questions from the 45 local authorities which completed the longer version of the questionnaire are shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Yes, in place</th>
<th>Yes, being developed</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not sure/Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A designated senior manager with responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of missing from care protocols / procedures</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A report about patterns of absence amongst looked after young people</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An action plan with targets for minimising missing from care incidents</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments of risk for young people who are identified as at risk of running away</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial assessments of risk for young people who run away from home</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement of local agencies concerned with the welfare of looked after children in agreeing risk assessment formats</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted that that for the three last rows of the table some respondents indicated that these recommendations had only been implemented for ‘looked after’ children.

Key questions

What more needs to be done to ensure that the guidance contains sufficient weight to effect change?
What additional elements are required to lever change in practice?

Missing Persons Guidance – ACPO/Centrex 2005

In 2005 the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) renewed its guidance to Chief Constables about the best practice in following up missing persons reports. (see appendix 1 for further details).
In summary, in relation to young runaways, the ACPO Guidance supports the following key elements of working to follow up a missing person incident:

- Effective multi-agency approach
- Named persons
- Intelligence gathering
- Links to national structures
- Assumption of risk; “IF IN DOUBT, THINK MURDER”

The police survey showed that:

- All 27 police forces had an identified lead person with overall responsibility for missing persons
- 17 forces also had designated officers within each Basic Command Unit
- 20 out of 27 police areas confirmed that information recording about missing children complies with the police national standards
- Plans were in place to develop systems in most other areas
- Several different IT systems for storing information were mentioned, so it is clear that there is some diversity of approaches

The ACPO Guidance provides a policy statement on the necessity of return interviews. However no guidance is given as to the requirement for emergency accommodation for young runaways or the nature of preventative work.

The ACPO Guidance would appear to have had a demonstrable impact on forces responses to missing young people.

Key questions

What could be done to increase data consistency and to address concerns about emergency accommodation, independent return interviews and referral routes locally?

How can forces be supported to ensure that officers who understand the ACPO guidance are in place for every local authority / borough across the country?

Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and Youth Matters Reforms

The Children Act 2004 sets out an agenda for change that provides the legislative framework for the Every Child Matters reforms. This framework is concerned with the services delivered for children and young people in England in order to promote their well being. The outcomes set out in the legislation and the agenda are:

- Be healthy (physical, mental and emotional)
- Stay safe (protection from harm and neglect)
- Enjoy and achieve (education, training and recreation)
- Make a positive contribution (to society)
- Achieve economic well-being (and social)
The implication for young runaways of the 2004 Act is potentially an improved needs assessment for services that target runaways within an area. This would include joint planning arrangements including the children and young peoples plan, joint commissioning and a shared view of safeguarding children and young people at risk through Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB) (See appendix 2 for further details).

*Youth Matters*

In addition to the Children Act 2004, the Youth Matters Green Paper was followed by a Next Steps document that highlighted the need to integrate support for young people in need. This Targeted Youth Support (TYS) was designed to highlight gaps in service provision for the most vulnerable young people and examine better processes for including them. The TYS Guide has recently been issued detailing the approach that local authorities should take toward those young people most at risk.

*Needs Assessment*

The local authority survey showed that Children’s and Young People’s Plans varied in their specification of running away.

*Has the Children and Young People’s Plan taken account of the needs of young runaways?*

![Bar chart showing the survey results](chart.png)

In the consultation, 60% of participants felt that the Every Child Matters reforms were helpful and to be welcomed and that, although it is still early days, the reforms will demonstrate broad ranging improvements. It was felt that the change process had been resource intensive and that the broader focus was stretching services. There was a particular concern about crisis services failing to meet need whilst the attention is focussed on preventative programmes.

*Consultation comment*

"My experience is that ECM has to date made little difference to my agencies response to missing from home"

Every region indicated that the new Local Safeguarding Children Board’s wider remit gave scope for leadership and analysis of the problem of running away. Some areas, like Birmingham, had developed multi-agency sub-groups to address the missing agenda, including missing from education and other universal services.
Consultation comment

60% of participants felt that multi-agency working helped.

“Multi-agency work is only just beginning within my area. A missing person steering group has just been set up. This I hope will be the facilitator of change.”

Young people said that mainstream services needed to be better equipped to deal with runaways.

“I went to the Police to speak to an emergency social worker and was told that they were not there so was sent away!!! – Ridiculous”

Targeted Youth Support

Targeted Youth Support reforms were not understood in any of the regions visited with the exception of one delegate in the North East who was part of an Integrated Youth Support programme that they believed to be linked to the reforms. This was almost certainly due to none of the pilot TYS areas being represented at the consultations and the early stage of the reform programme.

Patterns in implementation of guidance

The local authority survey data also offers the opportunity to explore the connections between implementation of different aspects of the guidance. One interesting point that emerges from an analysis of this data is that the presence of a strategic lead within an area appears to be connected with the likelihood of implementation of other aspects of the guidance:

- A full protocol was in place in 62% of authorities with a strategic lead and only 29% of authorities without one
- The Children and Young People’s Plan had taken account of the needs of young runaways in 38% of areas with a strategic lead and only one (7%) of the areas without one

Key questions

How can the ECM reforms be supported to bring about change directly for young runaways?

How can the use of the CAF be promoted in the assessment of need associated with running away or going missing?

Services for young runaways

Few areas reported, through the consultation, that there were dedicated services for runaways. Two services attending the consultation were to be closed in March, the remainder reported high levels of charitable income to sustain services beyond March, with the exception of police-led services where pressure on budgets raised uncertainties about sustainability.

The recent report issued by Parents & Abducted Children Together (PACT) “Postcode Lottery” (2006) asserts that the total number of services across the country in December of 2006 was 20, covering just over ten percent of local authorities. In other words there is evidence from the current published research or from the consultation that 90% of the country has no services. In the PACT report, services delivered ranged from drop-in and schools based services, return interview assessment and case work delivery to emergency accommodation in the form of emergency beds or refuge.

The survey however paints a different picture. When asked what runaway services were offered the
following data emerged;

- 50 out of 69 local authority areas responded that there were some services for runaways in their area. 38 provided more details about these services
- 23 out of 27 police forces said that they worked with some services in relation to running away, although not all these services were available for the whole police force area

Which of the following other services and initiatives relating to running away are currently available or undertaken in your local authority area?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>LA survey</th>
<th>Police survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preventative work in schools</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other preventative work</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible written information</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local telephone helpline</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting work</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return home interviews</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist runaways project</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach work</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from 40 areas</td>
<td>from 27 areas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whilst 40 out of 69 local authority responses is short of a nationally consistent level of services for young runaways it is better than the PACT survey or consultation events had suggested. However it is evident from the survey that the majority of the return home interviews are conducted by the police themselves, which can vary in response from an ‘alive and well check’ to a detailed welfare assessment. This fact alone leaves some uncertainty as to the nature of services reported in the survey. In 19 local authorities preventative work is undertaken and this would seem a better measure of the level of provision, which is more consistent with the other research data available and takes into account the indication that many local authorities use the police as a ‘runaways service’. Therefore it may be that a more accurate picture is that just over 12% of local authorities provide services for runaways.

All the areas which had specialist runaways projects also had an identified strategic lead for runaways.

The survey indicated that a range of agencies provided existing services. Analysis of these results demonstrated that there was;

- evidence of voluntary sector contracts including specialist projects
- a local authority focus on preventative work
- relatively little information offered or available on service costs

The local authority survey also asked respondents to assess the extent to which the services they had identified met the need in their local area. The responses from the 40 areas covered in the table above are shown below. Where services do exist they tended to be perceived by respondents as meeting some, or at best most of the known need within the local area.
To what extent would you say that each of the services listed meets the current known need in your area?

Specified services
‘Return Interview’ schemes

Further information from the police survey and from the follow-up interviews with local authority respondents clarified that the primary agency undertaking initial return home interviews was the police. In a number of areas, there was also evidence of involvement of other agencies including Social Services, Connexions and voluntary agencies. In some cases this involved conducting an initial interview. In other cases these agencies undertook follow-up work after initial contact from the police.

The regional consultations reported that where runaways received return interviews from independent agencies or through dedicated and specially trained statutory providers (who were placed in specialist runaways units), the outcomes for young runaways were positive. This type of work involves making an assessment of the reasons for running away, directing services for the young runaway and supporting them through that process of receiving services, in effect acting as a personal advocate. This model of work was demonstrated to reduce recidivism and prevent higher risk behaviours including behaviours likely to lead to teenage pregnancy, substance abuse and problems with mental health.

Participants also felt that every child who ran away should receive a return interview. It was proposed that a first-time runaway be assessed in line with the pre-assessment for a CAF, and that anyone repeating the behaviour or involved in risky survival strategies be assessed for a full CAF. Participants believed that this would best be undertaken by an independent agency, although ideally there should be a range of options that a young person themselves could make the choice from. The case study below demonstrates how one such project has implemented this process to safeguard runaways.

Young people said
Young people with experiences of running away said that they wanted better access to people to talk to and counselling provision.

“Just cos I look sorted there are still underlying issues”
Key questions
How can local authorities be supported to ensure that services meet the assessed local needs for runaways?
How can return interview standards be raised and maintained to a sufficient standard across the country?

Emergency accommodation
The initial responses to the local authority survey showed that out of 69 authorities only 20 indicated that there was emergency accommodation available for young runaways in their area. Of these areas, four had restricted or reserved provision through fixed or flexible refuge.

Is there any emergency accommodation available for young runaways in your local authority area?

Respondents were also asked to rate the extent to which the available provision met the need in their local area. No respondents felt that the provision ‘fully’ met the need in their area. Six felt that it ‘mostly’ met the need and a further three felt that it ‘partly’ met the need. For the remaining 11 areas where provision had been identified there was no response to this survey question.

Emergency accommodation services meeting need

- **Yes**: 20
- **No**: 42
- **Unknown**: 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of LA respondents (out of 69)</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>30</th>
<th>40</th>
<th>50</th>
<th>60</th>
<th>70</th>
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<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unknown</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Fully**: 0%
- ** Mostly**: 30%
- **Partly**: 15%
- **No response**: 55%
Availability of emergency accommodation for runaways appeared to be linked with the presence of a strategic lead in the area – 34% of areas that had a strategic lead said that there was emergency accommodation available for runaways, compared to 14% of areas without a strategic lead.

In every region an alternative to local authority accommodation for teenagers was felt to be needed by consultation participants. Anxiety about placing young people into looked after status was said to be driving decisions not to accommodate even on a short-term basis. Every region felt that a flexible alternative model of accommodation, that might in some larger cities include refuge, should be available. Proposals for flexible community-based accommodation provisions that did not trigger looked after status were observed to be a missing element of provision. Concerns about the lack of adequate provisions for safe non-looked after fostering options were also raised. The issue of emergency accommodation for teenagers generally was considered to be a wider safeguarding issue and the general feeling was that runaways should not be considered in isolation of the needs of other vulnerable groups of young people in need who are in practice unlikely to be accommodated in existing arrangements, such as young people seeking haven from trafficking or sexual exploitation.

Consultation comments

40% of participants said they had no access to emergency accommodation for runaways, a further 50% said that they had limited access and 10% that they had no knowledge.

“Emergency accommodation is almost non-existent. It is not unknown to have children/young people at police station for too long a period of time. Even if this goes against all guidance.”

“We had one young person staying at the police station for over ten hours whilst we tried to find accommodation”

“Foster carer provision is useful”

Young People said that they wanted immediate access to ‘breathing space’ or ‘refuge’ accommodation; conversely a minority would want access to foster carers.

“On the phone for time – 6 hours, need to do things quicker”

The police survey showed that less than half of responding forces reported that they had access to such emergency accommodation:

"Is there any emergency accommodation available for young runaways in your police force area?"
Police respondents were also asked about the extent to which they felt the available emergency accommodation met the need in their local area. Of the 10 respondents who had indicated that emergency accommodation was available, five respondents felt that this provision met the need. Some police forces recorded instances of young people staying in police stations overnight due to lack of appropriate accommodation for them. 10 out of 27 police forces participating in the survey confirmed that young people sometimes stayed at a police station due to lack of alternative places to go during the period 10pm to 6am, although several clarified that this was a temporary arrangement while awaiting a response from social services. The consultations also reported police officers having to stay in police canteens with children for several hours whilst chasing appropriate accommodation. This was reported as often resulting in a social worker or police officer returning the child home without an opportunity to prepare a proper assessment of the reasons for the child running.

Some local authorities reported unwritten policies of refusing any accommodation for thirteen to fifteen year olds. Police were keen to emphasise that they would raise concerns with social services but some local authority colleagues reported that teenagers were unlikely to receive support unless the level of risk was so high as to cause concern of risk to life.

Information from the two surveys is therefore consistent in suggesting both that emergency accommodation may not be readily available to young runaways in a high number of authorities across the country and also that, in areas where it is available, it does not necessarily fully meet the local need.

The provisions of the “The Homelessness (priority need for accommodation) (England) Order 2002” sets out the requirement for local authorities to provide accommodation for all children aged 16 or 17 provided that they have not been afforded looked after status and are not subject to the duties under section 20 of the Children Act 1989. Section 20 requires that accommodation is provided in the event that there is no person who has parental responsibility for a child; the child being lost or abandoned; and parents being prevented from being able to provide the child with suitable accommodation or care (whether or not permanently and for whatever reason).

In practice this means that children who are provided with accommodation by the local housing authority when they are aged 16 or 17 are housed in provisions that include hostels and B&B’s. However recent announcements from the department for Communities and Local Government (Tackling Youth Homelessness Policy Briefing 18) include a commitment that no 16 or 17 year old should be placed in B&B by 2010, although this comes with a caveat stating ‘except in an emergency’. There is also a commitment that supported lodgings schemes should be extended.

Statements made at the consultations showed that 16 and 17 year olds will often be subject to a difficult debate between Children’s Services and Housing while it is decided whether a section 20 duty exists. Where it does not, if the young person has been forced out of home because they came into conflict with rules in the home, this would be deemed intentionally homeless and therefore no provision would be made available. Despite these problems there is evidence from the consultations with professionals and with young people that some young people face situations where they are unable to access accommodation as runaways before the age of sixteen, and then at the age of sixteen can gain access to housing services if they remain homeless.
Key questions
Which is the best model for provision of emergency accommodation?
What level of direct access safe places is required to safeguard young people who run away?
- How can current best practice service provision be replicated?

Funding and commissioning
The survey responses contained limited data on funding and commissioning. There was evidence that services where they were provided came from a range of sources ranging from the police to voluntary sector providers.

Participants in the consultation events stated that short term unsustainable funding had damaged services for runaways and that there had been inadequate time given for services to imbed and evaluate outcomes. The early indications from the DCSF flexible refuge pilots point to similar problems.

In every region participants reported that the lack of monitoring in relation to missing and running away was acting as a hindrance to bidding for investment. In contrast, resources were being targeted toward issues and needs that were being measured. Participants repeatedly asked for clear government leadership centrally to ensure resources were released into this area of work.

Pooled budgets from across sectors and in some cases cross boundaries were acknowledged as important mechanisms for leveraging additional resources.

Consultation comments
All but one of the consultation participants felt that current commissioning and funding were failing to meet the need.
“Not even close - missing persons is not seen as a priority by all. Short term quick fix. Funding should be up to 5 years minimum”

Enabling and hindering factors
The surveys asked two concluding open questions about those areas of work that had facilitated or hindered work with young runaways.

Enabling factors
The following factors were stated as ones which had facilitated the delivery of services:

Multi-agency working
- *The involvement and commitment of senior managers in all partner agencies has been a key component in the development and implementation of a successful strategy, as has the contribution of an independent agency through the [name] project*
- *Joint training and launch of protocols with key partners is essential and gains ownership*
- *Excellent working links between [Area] Police, Social Care, Education and Vol Sector*
Collaboration with voluntary sector organisations

- Joint work with [national children’s charity]
- [National children’s charity] approached LSCB for support in developing new protocol and looking at gaps in services

Commitment and dedicated lead person(s) in the area

- Support of the LSCB and an energetic misper police officer
- Commitment to monitoring and to minimise incidents and support young people at risk of going missing / running away. Dedicated officers to focus on this area

Funding for pilot projects

- DoH funding for pilot project in the area and multi-agency steering group

Existence of independent specialist projects

- The involvement and commitment of senior managers in all partner agencies has been a key component in the development and implementation of a successful strategy, as has the contribution of an independent agency through the [name] project (repeated from above)

Recent Government policy initiatives

- We have an Early Intervention service which is tasked to work on leading CAF
- The Every Child Matters agenda
- Since the publication of the NCPE Guidance in 2005, the force now has more robust procedures in place for investigating missing persons

Hindering factors

The following factors were stated as ones which had hindered the delivery of services:

Lack of resources and restricted finances

- Lack of funding for outreach services
- Sheer numbers and limited resources
- Good practice with children who go missing requires time, and skilled input from front-line workers - as always, time and money are in short supply

Lack of data, evidence or knowledge

- Ability of [Area] Police database to produce data sets and reports
- The police need to develop their information systems (planned for several years) before we can understand the extent of this issue - once this data is available the need for service development can be properly tested
- We are a small area with few known runaways from home

Low priority within local services plans

- There is little senior management awareness of this issue and as a busy operations middle manager there is little more that I can do
• **Lack of capacity to lead this work against other priorities**
• **Protocol for runaways from care in place. Protocol for runaways from home not implemented - not seen as a strategic priority for education and children’s services**

Lack of dedicated staff to focus on issue
• **Not having an independent professional in place to ensure efficient monitoring process**

Lack of appropriate systems
• **Lack of case management system**

Lack/loss of independent project
• **The loss of the [local specialist project] that specialised in ‘young runaways’ has meant a loss of service and expertise**

Specific Local contextual factors
• **The size of the authority places a premium on effective communication and the constant need to the importance of this area of work at every level of the organisation (Large Shire County)**
• **[Area] having some of the most deprived areas in the country and associated social difficulties e.g DV, drugs, violence**

Barriers to inter-agency working
• **A reluctance for agencies to sign up to SLAs which set out their responsibilities – e.g. social services and mental health trusts. Reported lack of drive among social services managers concerning repeat mispers**

**Sector responses to findings**

The process for further engagement included a national conference, a national stakeholder group and ongoing dialogue with DCSF officials.

This provided an opportunity for the three sectors to debate the emerging findings from the survey and consultations. Each sector was, in the context of a seminar, given the opportunity to respond with three priority statements. These are presented here as they were received from the seminar groups.

**Local Authority seminar**
1. **To reissue and update DoH Children Missing from Home and Care guidance, must be statutory and ensure that agencies work jointly. This must also be joined up with other relevant guidance**
2. **Shift focus on working with this group of children and young people to prevention**
3. **Create a performance indicator around children and young people missing from families (this must be resourced from central government)**

**Police seminar**
1. **There must be a legal obligation to collate usable data, with a clear definition of missing/runaway children, and a deadline to implement this by April 2009**
2. **Performance Management, intelligence gathering across every agency must be shared, analysed and then actioned (as part of return interviews/staff observations)**
3. Clarity must be given on physical restraint, guidance from Government about what agencies can do to protect young people

Voluntary sector seminars

1. Any new guidance needs to be planned, funded, inspected and reported as a statutory requirement. Could this go into the local area agreements? We need to ensure that the child protection systems already in place for primary age children are also in place for teenagers

2. National leadership – the Local Safeguarding Boards should take leadership for young runaways at a local level. They must be accountable

3. The concept of a ‘national safety net for runaways’ is a good model, if holes are cut into it, it won’t work

**Key questions**

How can government demonstrate national leadership and accountability for the runaway issue?

How can available measures and procedures ensure better responses to runaways locally?
section 3: developing a problem analysis

This report does not seek to rewrite the 2002 ‘Young Runaways’ report from the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU). It does, however, examine the emerging questions, from the findings, that stakeholders will have to address in order to attend to the challenges in safeguarding young people who run away or are forced out of home. It seeks to develop a coherent problem analysis.

Key questions arising from the data

- How can a consistent and accessible data set be ensured from every police force across the country?
- How can forces be supported to ensure that officers who understand the ACPO guidance are in place for every local authority / borough across the country?
- How can data on levels of running away, as opposed to children reported as missing, be collected, including on those not reported missing to the police, to support local authority planning?
- What more needs to be done to ensure that the guidance contains sufficient weight to effect change?
- What additional elements are required to lever change in practice?
- What more needs to be done to increase local authority data consistency and to address concerns about access to crisis services?
- How can the ECM reforms be supported to bring about change directly for young runaways?
- How can the use of the CAF be promoted in the assessment of need associated with running away or going missing?
- How can local authorities be supported to ensure that services meet the assessed local needs for runaways?
- How can return interview standards be raised and maintained to a sufficient standard across the country?
- Which is the best model for provision of emergency accommodation?
- What level of direct access safe places are required to safeguard young people who run away?
- How can current best practice service provision be replicated?
- How can government demonstrate national leadership and accountability for the runaway issue?
- How can available measures and procedures ensure better responses to runaways locally?

As part of the process of analysing these questions, it has been decided to break down the issues into three areas; people, places and procedures. In answering questions about government leadership, and supporting local authorities to implement reforms and bring about change there is a need to specify which people should be accountable and have their capacity developed to meet the need. In order to answer questions about service provision and the development of existing provision there is a need to locate those services, that is to say to specify the places where services are delivered. Critically, to answer the questions relating to standardisation, process development and appropriate government levers for change, there is a need to specify the procedures that will bring lasting change.
Part 1 – People

Children’s Services

How can local authorities be supported to ensure that services meet the assessed local needs for runaways?

The existing guidance requires a strategic lead for young runaways to be appointed in each local authority.

Two opportunities now exist for leadership and accountability locally. The first is through Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB), who already hold a statutory partnership together for the purpose of safeguarding the welfare of children. The second is local arrangements put in place under the Targeted Youth Support (TYS) guide, which outlines mechanisms for targeting multi-agency support to the most vulnerable young people.

LSCBs should hold responsibility for appointing local leadership, reviewing need and approving strategic planning. There should, however, be a need to identify within local plans how responses to young people in need will be managed and the TYS arrangements locally have clear benefits in being utilised in this way.

The case study below demonstrates how one authority, Birmingham, has sought to address this issue and provides a clear example of multi-agency working in the context of the LSCB in order to ensure a strategic and locally owned response to the safeguarding needs of young runaways.
Case study 1

*Birmingham Safeguarding Children’s Board – Missing children & young people sub-group*

**Background**

The LSCB sub-group was set up to ensure that any child or young person missing from home or care has access to information, support and services that will protect them from harm, promote their well being and enable them to make a positive contribution to society.

The group consists of senior managers representing statutory and voluntary agencies in Birmingham who provide services to children and young people at risk of or who are missing from their carers.

**What is the purpose of the group?**

- To develop and support the implementation of an inter agency strategy for reducing the number of children and young people who go missing from care or home or from services required to promote welfare and protect from harm.
- To ensure the co-ordination of services to identify and track missing children to enable the targeting of support services for children and families that will protect the child from harm and promote their welfare.
- To reduce the number of children and young people who go missing from care and home.
- To ensure that the needs of missing children are promoted in all children’s services and that all agencies are aware of and carry out their responsibility to missing children effectively.
- To review and monitor procedures and protocols to ensure that agencies work together effectively and consistently to safeguard and promote the welfare of missing children.
- To engage and integrate children and young people to work with the BSCB Missing Children sub group and incorporate their views into future planning review, and delivery of services to missing children.
- To analyse missing children data to identify patterns and trends to inform policy development and partnership working to improve outcomes for missing children.
- To undertake specific tasks, consistent with the missing person group criteria, as defined by the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board to support implementation of the business plan.

**For further information please contact:**

Tina Roper-Wakfer, Assistant Head of Child Protection, Birmingham.

Email: Tina.L.Roper-Wakfer@birmingham.gov.uk

**Police**

*How can forces be supported to ensure that officers who understand the ACPO guidance are in place for every local authority / borough across the country?*

The current ACPO Missing Persons Guidance was a major step forward in supporting a change in the attitudes of many forces and has demonstrated positive outcomes in forming more robust approaches to intelligence. Specifically, it contains reference to the requirements of forces to appoint appropriate-level officers to oversee the management of missing persons. There are clearly still forces where this has not been implemented and appropriate incentives are needed to ensure that all forces have both...
strategic force-wide leads and borough/basic command unit-level officers in place.

The DoH Local Authority Circular 17(2002) contains a specific requirement on police forces to consider every missing child incident for referral to social services. Each force must satisfy itself that a sufficiently senior officer is appointed to oversee the information sharing and ongoing audit of engagement with children’s services and other agencies.

The case study below illustrates how one force in Lancashire has joined together with the voluntary sector and the local authority to provide a holistic response to the evident problem of children missing from care. It includes the designation of local liaison officers.

Case study 2
Lancashire Young Runaways Project

Background
The Children’s Society’s Lancashire Young Runaways Project (LYRP) works in partnership with Lancashire Constabulary and Lancashire County Council to develop initiatives that will tackle root causes of running away to ensure joined up, coherent service delivery. The project has been working directly with children and young people reported missing from care (foster care and children’s homes) across Lancashire since 2003.

What is the purpose of the project?
The project helps children and young people to identify the issues that led to their running away behaviour whilst supporting them in addressing those issues. At the time the project was developed 90% of all Missing From Home reports to Lancashire constabulary were for under 19s. Children in the care of Lancashire’s three local authorities account for 1% of all under 19s in Lancashire, yet they accounted for 50% of all under 19s Missing From Home reports to Lancashire constabulary.

What is the model of practice?
Role of Lancashire Young Runaways Project
- The project receives referrals from children and young people seen as the most vulnerable in respect of their missing from care behaviour. Referrals are taken from children's services, the police, other relevant agencies and from children and young people themselves. All children and young people will be in the care of Lancashire County Council, or in residential or foster care, or living independently. The project will receive daily information about children and young people that they have been working with that have gone missing, or returned to their residential or foster placement. The child or young person will then be contacted to arrange a return interview within four working days. Advice, information and signposting to relevant agencies will take place. Continued and direct work will take place to resolve any issue, and to attend and represent the child or young person at meetings. There is no time limit for the individual, and it will be reviewed on a regular basis to identify actions and next steps.

Role of Lancashire Constabulary
- Lancashire Constabulary appoint designated liaison officers who will provide Lancashire Young Runaways Project with daily updates about children and young people who have returned to their care placements. They will support the process of identifying children and young people missing
from foster care placements by giving access to relevant logs and other information that will aid the project workers role. The officer will also act as a link for any other information which is deemed necessary to be passed onto the Constabulary.

Role of Lancashire County Council

- Lancashire County Council support the project workers to gather information on residential homes, foster care and fieldwork services and how this relates to the phenomenon of children and young people who run away.

Role of supporting partners

- The statutory and voluntary organisations in Lancashire play an essential role in enabling the success of the Young Runaway’s project.

For more information please contact: Pauline Geraghty, Programme Manager, Lancashire Children’s Rights, email: pauline.geraghty@childrenssociety.org.uk

The role of the voluntary sector

How can return interview standards be raised and maintained to a sufficient standard across the country?

This consultation has echoed previously understood best practice that voluntary sector agencies have an important role to play in providing support for young runaways. Specialist projects are able to deliver targeted services for at risk young people meeting complex needs and assisting young people to engage with mainstream services. In terms of independence, the role of the voluntary sector can be to provide a service that will act as a trusted broker for young people. The confidentiality offered to young people, within the proper parameters, creates an environment where a young person who has lost trust in the role of statutory services can make a first point of contact or an opportunity to reconnect to services. Such independence can be of real assistance in developing an initial assessment and linking a young person to existing service provisions. Equally for looked after young people the opportunity exists for a voluntary sector provider to advocate on behalf of that young person in relation to any issues that may arise as a result of their placement.

The role of the return interview provided for young people is evidenced as a key component in successful services delivered for young runaways. The current situation remains that in the majority of authorities local police officers provide the ‘safe and well’ check, which should not be confused with a welfare assessment. A return interview that provides an assessment of need, examining the causes of the running away incident provides an opportunity for engagement with services to provide appropriate preventative support at an early stage. It is also important to note that such interviews provided by independent agencies are likely to gain trust with those young people who have disengaged from statutory services or who have other reasons to mistrust public sector provision.

The case study opposite illustrates how reformed systems of assessment and local partnerships, including the police community safety team, are used to effect an adequate intervention for young people who go missing from home and require an independent return interview.
Case study 3
Barnardo’s Missing From Home pilot project

Background

In December 2006, the Missing from Home pilot was set up. This pilot built upon work previously conducted by Justice Support, who provided interview and support to the young person and their family. The new work is a collaboration between the Cleveland Police Community Safety, Barnardo’s North East, CAF locality teams and Justice Support. The initial work of this project has been to update protocols for young people missing from home, including an information sharing protocol.

What is the purpose of the project?

- To develop a greater knowledge of issues for young people running away from home living within Middlesborough
- To reduce the number young people repeatedly running away from home
- To provide an interview and follow up support to young people and their families to access and engage with multi-agency support tailored to their needs

What is the model of practice?

- On being reported missing to the police, attending officers will complete the national police missing form and on their return complete an interview with young person and parent/carer(s).
- Each officer will pass information to the Community Safety team. Relevant information from the missing form transferred to a central database for all missing reports. This includes demographic details of the individuals, details about next of kin; information about the missing episode e.g. dates, times, where the person went to, how did they end up returning.
- Included within the national form is a consent form that parents/carers can sign to permit information about their child being shared with other agencies to help find the young person or to gain support for the future. In the case of young people missing from home, if this consent form is signed then information is passed to Barnardo’s.
- The young person and parents/carers are informed by the Police that Barnardo’s will be contacting them.
- Visits are then arranged where possible to meet the young person and parents/carers, and to complete a pre-CAF assessment, and specific questions relating to their missing from home incident. Next steps are planned with the young person, and whether they would like the opportunity to access ongoing support specific to their needs they agree to partake in a full CAF assessment.
- Any information that would help in cases of future missing from home periods e.g. places visited, are passed back to the Police by Barnardo’s and Justice Support following the pre-CAF and full-CAF assessments.

Emerging findings

- The project is already identifying young people who are being sexually exploited or at risk of sexual exploitation, who have links with trafficking. Many of them had not been accessing any service previously.

For more information please contact: Ady Davies, Senior Practitioner, ady.davis@barnardos.org.uk
Local needs assessment and data

How can data be collected on levels of running away as opposed to children reported as missing, including those not reported missing to the police, that will support local authority planning?

Local authorities will also need to consider how they collect data from both children who are missing from care and those who are missing from home. It will remain important to gather data from all privately, voluntarily and statutory run children in care provision, including foster carers, on levels of running away. The current data standard (SSDA903) provides for the reporting of missing incidents over 24 hours to be recorded, however it would appear to be an unreliable standard (The official returns reported to DCSF under SSDA903 show that in 2006 no young people were cared for within a section 51 refuge yet the London Refuge report for 2006/7 states that 12 Looked After Children were cared for). In addition it makes an assumption that a child missing overnight, even if it is every night, is not a significant issue of risk. Indeed many of the young people who are reported as having been sexually exploited will be away overnight and yet be returned to the place of care in the morning.

Local authorities should also make provision to assess local need as reported by young people themselves. The national survey of children and young people commissioned centrally by DCSF called TellUs2 provides an opportunity to question young people about levels of running away locally. The survey has limitations, in that it does not question young people in Year 11, when we know that most children runaway when they are 14 and 15 years old. However even the survey of Year 10 students will capture (given that it is conducted in May each year) most fourteen and fifteen year olds. Therefore this survey may replace a requirement for local authorities to commission their own local surveys.

Strengthening incentives

How can government demonstrate national leadership and accountability for the runaway issue?

All incentives must ultimately contain elements of accountability in them. That will require a clear message to local authorities that inspection and other forms of accountability will be looking at the extent of running away responses, as an indicator of the quality of safeguarding responses for teenagers.

OFSTED have a role to play in ensuring that new guidance is implemented and that any new PSA measures are cross-referenced against inspection reports on local services. In the same way HMIC will have a role to play in examining data standards in the police.

At a local level, LSCBs will need to ensure that annual reviews of levels of need and responses are being co-ordinated and adequately funded. In addition local co-operative working to achieve the best safeguards will also require careful review.

The missing persons agenda, the problems associated with young runaways being victims of crime or using risky and illegal survival strategies and youth justice issues have been in the Home Office brief. Preventing youth homelessness is a housing issue within CLG, and the problems faced through sexual exploitation, drug and alcohol abuse are DCSF and Department of Health issues. It is clearly necessary for this agenda to have cross-departmental leadership.

The progress against the 2002 Department of Health guidance has not been fully tracked as a result of a lack of political accountability. Therefore it has been suggested that runaway and missing children should be specifically designated within a ministerial brief.
Part 2 – Places
Direct and immediate access

What level of direct access safe places are required to safeguard young people who run away?

A recurring theme in the consultations was a lack of availability of services to respond. It is clear from the surveys that services are at best patchy and at worst non-existent. The Runaway Helpline reported at the consultations that access to services is not an option that is open to young runaways who call them in some parts of the country.

Young people tend to run away when a personal crisis hits, and this crisis point is often ‘out of hours’ for most services. Whilst police responses seek to be immediate and appropriate, the need for most young people who run away is to have a safe space in which to talk to someone, and to address the causes of the crisis that brought about the incident in the first place. Every local authority should be confident of their capacity to make both a crisis response and an appropriate safe space in which a young person can explore the issues behind the crisis.

Creating safe spaces may be about what might be called ‘enhanced’ youth services, it may be about ensuring access for runaways to key people and services within existing mainstream services and it may be about easy-to-access specialist runaway services. The key components of safe spaces are:

• 24 hour access
• Mainstream services referral agreements
• Links to further support
• Access to crisis ‘safe space’ accommodation

Service range and availability

How can local authorities be supported to ensure that services meet the assessed local needs for runaways?

Services provided for runaways may be available in a variety of forms. Some through mainstream services, e.g. connexions, and others through specialist services. The exact nature of each local authority’s service provision is difficult to lay out at a national level. It is clear from the consultation and best practice examples studied that a diverse range of services can offer support. The range of services that should be considered when reviewing services would at least include:

• Return interview assessment schemes (e.g. using the CAF)
• Family mediation work
• Specialist intensive support / Case work
• Advocacy services
• Drop in and outreach services
• Crisis accommodation

Adequate planning processes should also assess how commissioning processes will be used to ensure that services are procured on a sustainable basis and that appropriate arrangements are in place for joint commissioning.

A young person running away presents many different needs: the immediate protective needs that police forces are there to meet; the welfare needs that children’s services have duties to meet; and
health risks that are ever-present when a child runs away. It has been common amongst local runaways’ projects to circulate their bids for funding to a number of stakeholders before finding a funder, in many cases creating a funding mix with several different reporting requirements for any dedicated service. In a needs-led joint-commissioning environment this should not be the case. A needs assessment should lead to an adequate commissioning process to deliver services appropriately to the point of need. It is widely acknowledged that budgets are restricted and that therefore providing sufficient investment for three to five year procurement strategies is at best difficult.

A range of possible solutions exists, including joint procurement arrangements that take account of the potential investments from a range of statutory bodies including those involved in community safety, youth justice, public health and children’s services. Joint arrangements should also be explored across local authority boundaries where clusters of local authorities may wish to procure a joint service, particularly so in relation to accommodation needs, as are already being piloted in relation to meeting care needs.

The recent Care Matters consultation response indicated a need for greater support in commissioning of services. “There was general agreement with the idea of piloting new regional commissioning units. Some respondents felt that local authorities require support to enable them to commission services effectively and called for wider use of pooled budgets”.

Whilst the survey and consultation both indicate a need for needs based commissioning, some participants stated the need for more effective commissioning processes that included inter-agency and cross-boundary commissioning. There was no evidence that the move to Local Area Agreements or Children’s Trusts has yet impacted on services for young runaways or other groups of young people who were at risk on the streets, for example; because of sexual exploitation.

Accommodation

Which is the best model for provision of emergency accommodation?

The sparse coverage of appropriate and accessible emergency accommodation requires urgent attention. It was clear from all sources that the coverage for accommodation was at best partial and at worst not available. There was little agreement about types of accommodation. Some preferred specialist foster carers, some preferred to use emergency beds within children’s homes and others a Refuge.

Clear messages received from police surveys and the consultation are that there is a need for immediate access to accommodation or ‘safe breathing space’ in order to ensure that young people are neither forced to stay with possibly inappropriate friends and acquaintances, or housed in police stations overnight, or as is often the case when young people call a national helpline and there is no local service available, on the streets.

This study has not attempted to cost the components of accommodation models. However we do know that refuge appears to work best when located in major conurbations where they serve several local authority areas (The London Refuge Report 2006-7). There is also evidence from the Scottish and former Leeds refuge that such services can act as a ‘hub’ around which all surrounding locally-based services can interconnect. This ‘hub and spoke’ model of a ‘safe place’ at the heart of several authorities’ localised systems and services is the basis of recent service developments in South Yorkshire. In the stakeholder consultations, where refuge was provided respondents were positive about the benefits to children and young people. However the costs in London were considered to be a considerable barrier to sustainability.
Core components of a Hub and Spoke Model would appear to include:

- Independent welfare interviews
- Family mediation and conflict resolution
- Advocacy
- Personal intensive support
- Safe time-limited accommodation
- Co-ordination with other agencies
- Immediate access
- Accommodation not used when other measures are required

(Aberlour Childcare Trust – presentation to national conference May 18th)

The case study opposite illustrates how an emergency accommodation model can be embedded into an existing runaways service.
Case study 4 – Accommodation Hub

SAFE @ Last

Background

SAFE@Last is a registered charity working with and on behalf of young people who have run away from, or have been thrown out of, the place where they usually live – or are at risk of doing so. Based at Dinnington, Nr Sheffield and were established in 2001 in response to an acute need for services for the 1 in 9 children under the age of 16 in South Yorkshire who are affected.

What model is the practice?

Helpline

• SAFE@Last operates a free helpline service (0800 781 7536), which runs every day of the week. The helpline is operated by trained volunteers, and supported by a professional early response and ongoing support service aimed at ensuring immediate safety, and supporting a young person’s return to home or a place of care. The project also takes referrals from other agencies and helplines.

MISPER Scheme

• Working closely with South Yorkshire Police, the project runs a MISPER scheme for young people in Rotherham and Doncaster regions who are reported missing to the police, and subsequently returned home. Statistics show that the scheme has reduced repeat running from 59% to under 5%. The Project Workers have offered services to around 550 young people through this scheme since it began.

Preventative programme

• The programme works within most of the senior schools in South Yorkshire, Worksop and Chesterfield. In addition offering short, but specific workshop on the risks and dangers of running away presented to year 9 students.

Training

• SAFE@Last also supports the training of South Yorkshire Police recruits by delivering a training programme based around ‘Recognising and Understanding Young Runaways’.

Emergency accommodation

• SAFE@Last emergency accommodation opened on 11 April 2007 and is supported by 10 on-call staff. Access to the accommodation is by self-referral and provided for children and young people under the age of 16 who are at risk from where they are running from or where they are running to. Since opening the emergency accommodation has received 7 young people, with the average stay of 1 night. After the child/young person has left the emergency accommodation, the project provides them with an extended care package to support them with their lives and any difficulties they may be experiencing. Since opening 4 young people have self-referred but with support from project workers alternatives to being accommodated have been found.

For more information please contact: Tracey Haycox, Project Manager, email: tracy@safeatlast.org.uk
Alternative models of emergency accommodation

Recent work by DfES (now DCSF) undertaken to review the potential efficacy of other community based, flexible refuge responses is yet to be published. However, early indications are that no single case for a particular flexible refuge response has been proven. Some projects stated in the consultation that they had little or no need for emergency accommodation, although this was not cross-referenced with police force data. There was however a trend to look toward foster care models of safe emergency accommodation. This model has been adopted and has been working for some time in Bradford.

Because the situation in which a local authority can accommodate a young person under 16 without affording that young person looked after status is limited primarily to section 17 of The Children Act 1989, many local authorities reported having operated “unwritten policies” to avoid accommodating young people aged fourteen and fifteen, and in one area even thirteen year olds. This can result in a young person being urged to return home when this is unsuitable and will often result in repeat incidence of running away, and potentially in a worst case scenario can mean the young person returning to a situation of abuse or neglect.

Therefore, a concept that was proposed and was largely welcomed by consultation delegates was that of a community based ‘breathing space’ model for teenagers.

There exists for young people aged 16-25 a system known as ‘Nightstop’ that provides immediate access to crisis accommodation in private homes for those young people who need to stay somewhere safe overnight.

“Nightstop is the provision of emergency accommodation for single homeless 16-25 year olds exclusively in the homes of approved volunteers. The host offers a bed for the night, meals, an opportunity for the young person to bath and wash their clothes and a friendly listening ear.

The approach is intended to keep the young person in a safe and friendly environment whilst allowing agencies time to look at the alternatives available to the young person or maybe even to use mediation services to help them to return to family where this is appropriate.”

[www.nightstop-uk.org](http://www.nightstop-uk.org)

An evaluation of alternative models of safe breathing space should include a review of the use of Refuge exclusively for runaways and an analysis of the needs of other at risk groups who could benefit. There were reports in the consultation that young women who are seeking to exit sexual exploitation also require safe breathing space where they can consider their options.

This report has not detailed conclusively the nature of safe emergency accommodation but it is clear that this report’s findings and the findings of the Flexible Community Based Refuge Pilot Evaluation need to be brought together to consider a new way forwards.

Assessment of need

*How can the use of the CAF be promoted in the assessment of need associated with running away or going missing?*

If the Every Child Matters reforms, as they embed, are to improve services then there is a need to show how the engagement with this issue is being taken into account in a number of arenas. These include Children and Young People’s Plans, Children’s Trusts and Local Area Agreements. The indications from the consultation are that many local authority officers want to use the mechanisms available to them but lack models of working that will assist them in that process.
In addition the use of the CAF and Contact Point (formerly the Child Information Sharing Index) provide opportunities for better engagement and working with young people. In particular it is important to note that young people who have multiple or complex needs will require the integrated and targeted support that both CAF and Contact Point can assist in. The TYS Guide indicates that these elements are key to providing the right level of support to vulnerable and at risk young people including those who run away. The primary issue facing local authorities is building capacity to deliver the TYS guidance locally. Change fatigue was noted by a number of delegates as a reason for not engaging in the runaway agenda specifically.

Whilst DCSF have consistently said that running away is an issue for local authorities to tackle and manage, it is the role of central government to provide leadership in setting out indicators of risk, including running away and in promoting best practice responses. To do this requires both a central commitment to the issues and the promotion of best practice, models of support and capacity building programmes. Nationally promoting both the risks of running away and the best practice models for local authorities to adopt will require a capacity building package alongside any statutory guidance that would be issued.
Case study 5

*Talk.Don’t Walk Project.*

**Background**

Talk Don’t Walk was set up in 2004 with Invest to Save funding and due to the major impact that it has had on this issue, which has been sustained throughout the initial 3 year pilot project, it now receives main stream funding from local stakeholders via the local strategic partnership. It was developed as an intervention, which prevents situational deterioration, identifies the issues behind why young people run away and addresses these before they reach the need for crisis intervention. By ensuring that those who have previously been unable to access services (often because they are not viewed as being in crisis) can now do so, the project prevents them reaching a point where they need other services.

The programme works via the identification of all the issues affecting the young person and their family, then locating and engaging all the services that are required, and finally ensuring that service users are satisfied with the outcomes and that their issues have been resolved.

**What is the purpose of the project?**

- To reduce the number, frequency and instances of young people missing from home
- To reduce the risks to health, involvement in crime and improve safety, educational and social development for young people who have runaway from home
- To deliver services to young people and their families in a way that they can be easily accessed
- To improve the long-term relationship of young people and their families throughout Warrington
- To work with young people in the looked after system and address the issues behind why they run
- To provide education and awareness raising by providing lesson plans and materials to schools, and training others i.e Connexions advisers

**What are the outcomes for children and young people?**

- Recordable crime for this group has been reduced by 51% (the project lifetime target was 6.35%)
- There has been a reduction of 313 runaway incidents (the original target was 166 over the project lifetime)
- Cost savings to Cheshire constabulary for the Warrington division of over 1 million pounds
- Engaged over 300 young people and their families in direct work
- Over 16,000 people have had contact with the project since its start

**For more information please contact:** Alison McCausland, Project Leader
email: alison.mccausland@cheshire.pnn.police.uk | alisonm@healthyrelationships.org.uk
Part 3 – Procedures

National data standards

How can a consistent and accessible data set be ensured from every police force across the country? How can data on levels of running away, as opposed to children reported as missing, be collected, including on those not reported missing to the police, to support local authority planning?

The majority of participants in the consultation were looking for a clear and unequivocal requirement made of local government to provide minimum standards for runaways’ services across the country. This was clearly articulated as a request to enforce national data standards on both local authorities and police forces. It was the view of many participants that a national standard relating to data would ensure that data quality provided a clearer and more consistent picture of need.

Accurate local data is required if assessments of local need are to be made, however, existing data that is already held by police forces is not always accessible. This can be for a range of reasons but in some instances it is because of misunderstandings about information sharing, either because of poorly implemented protocols or because of a failure to agree information sharing provisions within the protocols. For local authorities to assess need, the information currently available; including assessments of risk; frequency of incidence among young people; and failures in services to respond need to be available. This will require police forces to make appropriate arrangements to make borough or authority analysis of data available to local authorities.

Some police forces have already begun to work together across boundaries. One example of a system used to facilitate this is the common Information Technology (IT) system called COMPACT (Community Policing and Case Tracking). This intelligence model based software provides forces with not only a data collection device but a case and risk management process. It also has full cross-border compatibility and provides automatic reporting to the Police National Missing Persons Bureau and Missing People in accordance with the national protocols. Those police forces that were represented at the consultations who took a proactive approach to young runaways were in all cases working with an IT based system of some description.

Analysis of police missing children data is not only an excellent tool for intelligence led policing but it can provide important data for local authorities to assess levels of need, with the caveat that 68% of all runaways are currently not reported missing to the police (Rees and Lee 2005). It is understood by practitioners that many children who run away from home or are thrown out of home are not reported missing either because the parents themselves do not want to draw any attention to the situation or because of a breakdown in trust with statutory services.

Monitoring and inspection

What more needs to be done to ensure that the guidance contains sufficient weight to effect change? What additional elements are required to lever change in practice?

The evidence from the regional consultations showed a high level of support for closer monitoring of local authorities in delivering services to young runaways. Specifically, requests were made that sought performance management of the runaway and missing persons responses, particularly from local authorities.

At the national conference a number of delegates raised concerns about the perverse incentives of some performance measures. For example the requirement to provide a formal assessment within seven days can incentivise local managers to develop bureaucracies to keep children and young people
from being listed as requiring a formal assessment.

In most cases the requests were for positive incentives to focus on this risk area. Finding the correct balance of demonstrating the importance of running away as an early indicator of risk and not causing perverse incentives is important. It is also important to demonstrate in any performance management system the nature of the problem and how services are delivering improved outcomes for young people.

Commissioning of services would need to include, within service specifications, the Every Child Matters Outcomes and specific targets relating to other safeguarding and improving life chances targets. Whilst there remains a culture of target driven performance it will be important to factor running away into a specific indicator relating to the Local Government Public Service Agreement (PSA) framework.

**Policy drivers**

*How can the ECM reforms be supported to bring about change directly for young runaways?*

Young people who get into trouble with the police, have problems with drugs or alcohol or who go missing from school are four times as likely to have runaway overnight as children who do not have these problems (Rees & Lee 2005). This link between running away and other risks facing young people is an indicator of the interrelated nature of any difficulties that a young person might face.

The DCSF TYS programme is seeking to address the needs of young people who have multiple issues that present a risk to their long-term positive outcomes. Significant risks related to running away affects at least 25,000 young people each year who require targeted help to stay safe. Similarly 29,000 runaway more than twice, exposing themselves to increased levels of risk (Rees & Lee, 2005). Projects working with runaways indicated that a young person is much more likely to stay somewhere unsafe if they runaway for longer periods or on more than one occasion.

Government targets to reduce truancy, children who are missing from education, teenage pregnancy, offending behaviours and victims of crime could all be addressed in part by an early intervention approach to the issue of running away. It may be helpful to think of running away as the equivalent of an adult presenting themselves at Accident and Emergency. The purpose of which is to alert services to a crisis. Many young people alert services to a crisis by running away and as with A&E it is vital to have the right primary and secondary care available alongside good preventative education programmes.

One way of viewing the issue of running away is to understand how the presenting problems are affected by underlying causes. Using the information gathered in this analysis, the opposite diagram attempts to draw together the effects, for runaways, of inadequate safeguards.
The Children’s Society Runaway’s Problem Analysis

**Causes**
- Focus is on statistically evident group - LAC
- ECM Reforms not prioritising teenagers
- At risk teenagers unable to access support that gives breathing space and/or accommodation

**Effects**
- Multiple incidents and negative outcomes
- Homelessness/taken into care
- Victims of crime - high risk to safety
- Missing from education and other services
- Prostitution, addiction and offending behaviours
- Sexual exploitation, drugs and begging
- Personal issues and isolation - repeat incidence
- Sleeping rough and in strangers houses
- Family relationships broken down

**Current arrangements are not safeguarding the majority of children who runaway, are thrown out or otherwise go missing**

- DH Guidance implementation is patchy and incomplete
- Infrastructure is incomplete
- Inadequate services
- Inadequate early interventions
- Links are not made between running away and risky behaviours

---

**ECM Reforms not prioritising teenagers**

---

**Services not delivered on first or second incidence**

---

**Unavailable personal or family support**

---

**At risk teenagers unable to access support that gives breathing space and/or accommodation**
This consultation has demonstrated that the help provided for those children who runaway for the first time is just as important as the help provided in higher risk situations. For example a young person who runs away over night for the first time under the age of 11 is twice as likely to run away more than three times over the course of their childhood (Rees & Lee 2005). One approach to managing the range of services provided at both early and late interventions would be a tiered response to running away. A tiered service model can ensure that appropriate services are available for different levels of need.

The original tiered service model was designed by Pauline Hardiker (1991) and provided a model for Children’s Services. Drug services, health visitors and child and adolescent mental health teams have used this model widely. The development of a vulnerable adolescent tiered service model of which runaways would be an identified group could be a pragmatic approach to integrating a needs analysis and service development framework for children and young people at risk on the streets.

Two models are outlined below; the original Hardiker model and then a model developed for the analysis of children who run away. The runaway tier model takes an approach that places n

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Support Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>All children are provided with support through universal services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Additional support for young people who have specific needs and whose parents consent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Ongoing support for young people with serious problems who require specialist and intensive help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>High level support for young people who are most at risk with multiple needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Model 2: The Children's Society Hardiker Adapted Runaways Tier Model

**tier 4: high risk of harm**
- children at risk of long term difficulties and/or complex and multiple needs or high risk survival strategies
- therapeutically based accommodation | long term case work with therapeutic aspect | integrated support for multiple needs | child protection | CAMHS | drug and alcohol services | multi-agency risk management as below

**tier 3: at risk**
- children running away on more than one occasion or running due to complex need, or running using risky survival strategies
- emergency accommodation including refuge | return interviews | independently provided case work | family mediation | counselling | sexual health | drug and alcohol services | multi-agency risk management through protocols and safeguarding board strategic leadership

**tier 2: vulnerable**
- children at risk of running away or have runaway once and stayed safe with safe friends or family
- access to runaway helpline and information services | access to community outreach, drop ins, schools work, education welfare & support services | positive support from teachers, youth workers | connexions advisors | parenting support | LAC access to advocates | identification within universal services

**tier 1: all children**
- universal services
- health, education etc. | PHSE | information about the risks of running away
- access to helplines - childline, runaway helpline
Objective’s Analysis

This diagram shows how by addressing the challenges set out in the problem analysis diagram; young people could experience improved outcomes.

**Focal Objective:**

- Central and local arrangements safeguard children who runaway, are thrown out of home or otherwise go missing.

**Means:**

- Running away seen as early indicator of other target issues.
- Local analysis of evidence leads to needs led commissioning.
- National data standards for missing from home and care.
- ECM - provide safeguarding boards with lead.
- Pre-CAF identifies need for services or full CAF.
- Renewed guidance provides clear framework for services.
- Family support initiatives cover 12-18 years.
- National catalyster initiative for best practice.
- Minimum service infrastructure in place.

**Ends:**

- Preventative and early interventions responses reduce multiple incidents and negative outcomes.
- Young people are supported to stay safe and exit risky behaviours.
- Young people re-engaged with mainstream services.
- Young people aware of risks on the streets.
- Support to live at home or in other safe arrangements.
- Family support brings reconciliation.
- Specialist services provide drop-in and case based support services.
- Personal advocacy delivered via return interviews.
- Emergency accommodation available and taken up.

This diagram illustrates the interconnection of objectives, means, and ends in addressing the challenges of runaway children and ensuring they receive appropriate support.
In summary these models demonstrate one approach to meeting some of the underlying problems raised by the questions in the findings. Developing any service framework, and particularly a coherent tier model, would require an engagement from across the national and local agencies and agreement about concepts and risks.
section 4:  
the national safety net

The following section outlines a set of proposals that seek to address the issues raised in the problem analysis, and takes into account the factors stated by consultees as ones which had facilitated or hindered the delivery of safeguards for runaways:

Enabling factors

- Multi-agency working
- Collaboration with voluntary sector organisations
- Commitment and dedicated lead person(s) in the area
- Funding for pilot projects
- Existence of independent specialist projects
- Recent Government policy initiatives

Hindering factors

- Lack of resources and restricted finances
- Lack of data, evidence or knowledge
- Low priority within local services plans
- Lack of dedicated staff to focus on issue
- Lack of appropriate systems
- Lack/loss of independent project
- Specific local contextual factors
- Barriers to inter-agency working

Safety Net Concept

The concept formulated here is that a comprehensive framework is needed that can tackle the multiple dimensions of the problem and take account of the enablers and hindrances. Combing the safeguarding principles in terms of ‘safety’ with the three parts of people, places and procedures provides a basis for the framework. The concept of the ‘safety net’ therefore is **safe people, safe places and safe procedures**, providing proposals at every level; **national, regional and local**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>safe people</th>
<th>national</th>
<th>regional</th>
<th>local</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>safe places</td>
<td>39 proposals are detailed that form the basis for the national safety net</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>safe procedures</td>
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The following proposals form key elements of the National Safety Net:

- The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) minister who holds the safeguarding brief is given strategic responsibility for ensuring cross-departmental safeguarding responses to runaways and engages all stakeholders internally and externally
• DCSF to introduce a new indicator related to runaway and missing children within the new performance framework linked to the Safeguarding Public Service Agreement
• DCSF to create a statutory duty for local authorities to ensure that every child who is returned from a missing incident receives a ‘return interview’ to a standard that ensures a proper assessment of need is made in accordance with a pre-common assessment framework process
• Every LSCB appoints a strategic leader for runaway and missing children, which is closely defined by role description
• DCSF with the Department of Health and CLG undertake a review of emergency accommodation which addresses a range of issues including; the need for different models for different groups of young people, the status of children who access emergency and breathing space accommodation, the need for parental permission and the thresholds for entry
• Local authorities to set out access criteria and capacity of emergency accommodation provisions including detailing the management of missing children in need of breathing space for welfare assessments
• DCSF to update and revise missing from home and from care guidance ensuring that statutory requirements are specified and clarified and its position harmonised with ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’
• ACPO to issue national police code on data collection and reporting standards required of Police Forces relating to missing people
• Police Forces to ensure that BCU level lead officers are in place and that they embed standards of reporting and monitoring of social services’ responses to police requests for support

The proposals

In presenting the following the detailed proposals, there is an attempt to address the issues in detail. However each proposal is a headline requiring its own detailed planning to achieve a workable objective.

The Children’s Society presents the Safety Net as a comprehensive solution to the varied layers of problems presented in this report. It is hoped that the Department for Children, Schools and Families will consider the net as a whole. However it is understood that each of the proposals stands alone and it is hoped that each proposal will also be considered by the Department on its own merits alongside its part in the net.

It is hoped that this report will provide the basis for a response from DCSF in the autumn and create a momentum for change and development of the support and safeguards that the Government have committed to provide for young runaways.

The following table shows how the 39 proposals outlined in the following pages provides a comprehensive framework for addressing systemic change to ensure national safeguards are in place.
Following table: The National Safety Net for Runaways

- **National**
  - Secretary of State leads the safeguarding response to runaways
  - National funding and resources provide safe places
  - National guidance, standards, and monitoring act as catalyst

- **Regional**
  - Police force strategic leads and government offices accountable
  - Missing services and accommodation act as focus for safe places
  - Force wide missing procedures are monitored and regional commissioning units assist in planning services

- **Local**
  - Local safeguarding children board’s take strategic leadership
  - Refuge and breathing space hubs at centre of safety net
  - Local strategic plans address needs, services, and inter-agency working

- **Safe People**
- **Safe Place**
- **Safe Procedures**
Proposals
Below follows the detailed proposals that form the basis of the safety net. Those proposals in bold create key elements of change that will support an overall transformation in services.

Safe people

National people
Secretary of State leads the safeguarding response to runaways
1. The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families takes cabinet level responsibility for the implementation of the youth safeguarding agenda including protecting young runaways.
2. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) minister who holds the safeguarding brief is given strategic responsibility for ensuring cross-departmental safeguarding responses to runaways and engages all stakeholders internally and externally.
3. DCSF uses appropriate channels to specify that runaway and missing children are a safeguarding issue and as such must be managed at a local level by LSCBs.
4. DCSF co-ordinates a joined up approach to preventing youth homelessness through addressing runaway and missing issues and addresses through policy changes the disparity between DCSF policy and that of Communities and Local Government (CLG); for example, in relation to immediate access to appropriate emergency accommodation.
5. DCSF to introduce a new indicator related to runaway and missing children within the new performance framework linked to the Safeguarding Public Service Agreement.
6. DCSF utilise the national TellUsz Survey to provide a measure for the runaway indicator and to provide young people with an opportunity to self report on the levels of running away and risks faced by young runaways annually and nationally.
7. DCSF, the English Coalition for Runaway Children (ECRC) and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) work together to implement a joint communications strategy that will engage the local authorities and the wider public.
8. DCSF to create a statutory duty for local authorities to ensure that every child who is returned from a missing incident receives a ‘return interview’ to a standard that ensures a proper assessment of need is made in accordance with a pre-common assessment framework process.

Regional people
Police Force strategic leads and Government Offices accountable
9. ACPO strengthens, clarifies and embeds the strategic ‘misper’ lead into force level structures
10. Government Office children’s and safeguarding lead advisers are linked into supporting local developments on missing and running away.

Local people
Local Safeguarding Children Boards take strategic leadership
11. Directors of Children’s Services are held accountable for the implementation of the new statutory duty to ensure that all Police requests to undertake a ‘return interview’ are fully complied with.
12. Every LSCB ensures that safeguarding runaways fits within their wider and stated policy and strategy for safeguarding teenagers.
13. Every LSCB holds accountability for the planning and implementation of all new national
guidance issued from DCSF
14. Every LSCB appoints a strategic leader for runaway and missing children, which is closely defined
by role description.
15. Every LSCB undertakes a needs and capacity gap analysis in order to develop a plan that will
address capacity short falls.

Safe places
National places
National funding and resources provide safe places
16. DCSF with the Department of Health and CLG undertake a review of emergency accommodation
which addresses a range of issues including; the need for different models for different groups of
young people, the status of children who access emergency and breathing space accommodation,
the need for parental permission and the thresholds for entry.
17. DCSF to examine the merits of the US Spinal Cord model of providing a national funding stream,
for safe places, that can act as a catalyst to local investment from the public and private sectors.
18. SOG to examine the roles of the Missing People runaway helpline as a strategic and stable part of
the infrastructure as per the US model and to support a rationalisation between the generalist
helplines and Missing People.

Regional places
Refuge and breathing space hubs at centre of safety net
19. DCSF, the Scottish and Northern Ireland Executives to commission joint research that will
provide analysis of mid-term outcomes for young people accessing regional or sub-regional
emergency accommodation hubs across the UK with particular regard to impact on the
safeguarding and targeted youth support priorities.
20. DCSF to use development of regional commissioning units to make assessment of need for
emergency and breathing space accommodation across regions linked to evaluation of current
regional models.
21. Police Forces to work with Government Offices on developing regional protocols on managing
safeguarding responses for children who run away ‘out of area’ and across borders.

Local places
Missing services and emergency accommodation act as focus for safe places for at risk
young people
22. Directors of Children’s Services to ensure that schools and education, including connexions and
missing from education services make links with LSCB strategy for missing and runaway children
and that capacity is developed appropriately to implement guidance
23. Local authorities to set out access criteria and capacity of emergency accommodation provisions
including detailing the management of missing children in need of breathing space for welfare
assessments.
24. Local authorities, Police Forces, Primary Care Trusts and service providers to develop local crisis
response protocols to address out of hours services for at risk young people, including runaways,
detailing thresholds for support and inter-agency work that will meet immediate needs.

25. Local commissioning bodies involve young people in the development of specifications that set out the provision of the required accessible services, including emergency accommodation, for young people who runaway and go missing.

26. Children and Young People’s Plans take account of the needs of young people at risk on the streets including the development of safe spaces for preventative work, for example ‘drop-in’ centres and youth detached work.

Safe procedures

National procedures

National guidance, standards and monitoring act as change catalyst

27. DCSF to update and revise missing from home and from care guidance ensuring that statutory requirements are specified and clarified and its position harmonised with ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’.

28. ACPO to issue national police code on data collection and reporting standards required of Police Forces relating to missing people

29. Annual ‘Missing People’ conference acts as reporting window for Police to share intelligence and monitoring data from previous year, to include monitoring of local authority responses.

30. DCSF to ensure that revised guidance supports the role of LSCBs to develop and implement a strategic plan to meet the needs of runaways.

31. DCSF, ACPO and the Home Office to develop a national inter-agency risk model specifying thresholds, definitions and application for runaway and missing children which is to be included in the revised guidance from DCSF and ACPO.

32. NPIA 2007 update of 2005 ACPO ‘Misper’ guidance to be revised to address key issues including the monitoring of social services responses and data consistency

33. DCSF to utilise consultation on national tiered framework for care placements (Care Matters white paper) to examine the opportunity for a wider consultation on a tiered framework for all young people at risk including those at risk through running and going missing.

Regional procedures

Force wide missing procedures are monitored and regional commissioning units assist in planning services.

34. Police Forces to review implementation of procedures and data standards to ensure that monitoring and recording practices, including recording of social services responses, in order to inform planning processes.

35. DCSF to examine how the development of regional commissioning units can be used to support commissioning processes for services for runaways and missing children.
Local procedures
Local strategic plans address needs, services and inter-agency working

36. Every LSCB implements processes for intelligence led needs analysis and scenario planning in order to address the differing tiers of need for young runaways.

37. Every LSCB utilises local Common Assessment Framework and trusted adult arrangements to form basis for ‘return interviews’

38. Police Forces to ensure that BCU level lead officers are in place and that they embed standards of reporting and monitoring of social services responses to police requests for support.

39. DCSF provides examples of local services engaging with Children’s Trusts and Local Area Agreement processes.
resource implications

In order to examine the potential impact of the proposals outlined in the previous section, it is important to review the resource implications. It is not feasible in this report to appraise the resource implications of all 39 proposals. However, nine key proposals are addressed here and indicative resource implications given.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Resource implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proposal</strong></td>
<td>The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) minister who holds the safeguarding brief is given strategic responsibility for ensuring cross-departmental safeguarding responses to runaways and engages all stakeholders internally and externally (Proposal 2)</td>
<td>Limited resource requirements, mainly DCSF staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proposal</strong></td>
<td>DCSF to introduce a new indicator related to runaway and missing children within the new performance framework linked to the Safeguarding Public Service Agreement. (Proposal 5)</td>
<td>Local authority resources will be deployed to ensure that effective working will meet performance management standards. It is unlikely that a local authority that is failing to provide in some way at present for runaways will choose the runaways indicator. The resource impact is likely to be focused on strengthening and sustaining existing resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proposal</strong></td>
<td>DCSF to create a statutory duty for local authorities to ensure that every child who is returned from a missing incident receives a ‘return interview’ to a standard that ensures a proper assessment of need is made in accordance with a pre-common assessment framework process. (Proposal 8)</td>
<td>Local authorities must provide sufficient resources to target young people in need and at risk of poor outcomes. Some of these resources are currently invested in mainstream provisions for example Connexions and some invested in provision by the third sector. Where a local authority has not yet rationalised this provision there may be a gap that would require additional investment to develop this service. The evidence from return interview schemes shows overall cost savings to Police, Health and Children’s Services because negative outcomes are reduced, and positive engagement with mainstream services increases, forming the basis for efficacy for such services. In a pooled budget scenario they should be seen as cost neutral or cost beneficial.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Proposal

Every LSCB appoints a strategic leader for runaway and missing children, which is closely defined by role description. (Proposal 14)

Resource implications

This should be a cost neutral proposal that ensures that existing resources are deployed effectively. This role would be combined with a wider role and may well form the sub-brief of someone with wider safeguarding teenagers responsibility.

Proposal

DCSF with the Department of Health and CLG undertake a review of emergency accommodation which addresses a range of issues including; the need for different models for different groups of young people, the status of children who access emergency and breathing space accommodation, the need for parental permission and the thresholds for entry. (Proposal 16)

Resource implications

This review will require the resourcing of a high level national stakeholder group, opportunities for a wider range of stakeholders to be engaged nationally as well as dedicated resources to synthesise existing knowledge about accommodation. This investment could be factored into work associated with the Care Matters Bill.

Proposal

Local authorities to set out access criteria and capacity of emergency accommodation provisions including detailing the management of missing children in need of breathing space for welfare assessments. (Proposal 23)

Resource implications

The setting out of clear protocols for access to emergency accommodation and specifying desired and actual provision should assist local authorities in strategic planning and commissioning. Any local authority that has failed to plan adequately for emergency provision may need to review current resource provision.

Proposal

DCSF to update and revise missing from home and from care guidance ensuring that statutory requirements are specified and clarified and its position harmonised with ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’. (Proposal 27)

Resource implications

DCSF will need to commission this work and provide appropriate levels of resources. However as the research from The Children’s Society already sets out substantial evidence, the process should be cost effective.
### Proposal

ACPO to issue national police code on data collection and reporting standards required of Police Forces relating to missing people. (Proposal 28)

**Resource implications**

The cost of every police force in the country implementing a compliant IT solution is relatively low as systems are already developed and therefore they are available ‘off the shelf’. There are also possibilities for systems to be shared where they have been developed ‘in-house’. The operational effectiveness of police forces in managing crime as a result of this measure would clearly bring direct cost benefits.

### Proposal

Police Forces to ensure that BCU level lead officers are in place and that they embed standards of reporting and monitoring of social services responses to police requests for support. (Proposal 38)

**Resource implications**

Assigning duties to existing police infrastructure should be cost-neutral. However, capacity building strategies may have cost implications and effective training will certainly ensure positive impact of such a strategy. Capacity building of officers should be factored into overall staff development budgets.
Spinal Cord funding

In concluding this section it is helpful to consider what a ‘spinal cord’ funding stream might look like.

**Case study 6**  
*United States of America National Programme*

**Background**

Since 1974 the US Government has funded a multi-million dollar federal programme to provide support for young runaways. The current investment is at $105 million each year.

**What does the programme provide?**

The programme provides:

- Street outreach services
- Refuge type shelters for emergency accommodation
- Transitional programmes for supported living
- Infrastructure network

Alongside what amounts to a national network of immediate access services a national database is maintained that provides a single point of contact for local and national agencies seeking to refer young runaways onto services. This database provides access to 17,000 different services across the country.

The vast majority of the investment is managed through national grant programmes. Grants provide pump priming for local investment. Services typically make up the rest of the income from local authorities and private sector investment. Corporate sponsorship though financial investment, in-kind services and volunteering all form a part of most services.

Capacity building and data management form an integral part of a spinal cord of support for services delivered to young runaways across the USA. There is a particular emphasis on the full engagement of young people with participation strategies including using young people to assess grant applications as part of assessment panels.

Lessons from the US model for the UK include:

- Integrated and comprehensive service provision
- Central government leadership and accountability
- Cross-sectoral partnerships
- Monitoring and data management systems
- Strategic pump priming grants programme
- Capacity building and technical support programme
- Full engagement and participation of young people
Evidence from the United States of America shows that where Federal funding is applied on a core basis only, it can assist local projects to access additional local public and private investment.

For example the Families and Youth Services Bureau funding programme provides up to $200,000 per ‘refuge’ per annum for three years. In practice a refuge costs about $600,000 to maintain p.a. and therefore the three year federal investment requires double-match funding.

This approach, as it is a three-year commitment from the Federal Government, provides a stability that enables local projects to plan and bid for sustained investment. Non-residential projects in England can operate successfully at a budget of £150,000. However, the cost differential for including residential elements is widely debated but probably costs at least another £100,000 p.a. on a flexible basis. Fixed, open-access refuge that has a retained 24/7 workforce in larger premises can push costs much higher.

An example based on broad headline figures:
A government catalyst programme offers grants from £50,000 to £100,000 per annum for three years on the basis of match funding from local public and independent investment. This is rolled out across every sub-region, resulting in approximately 54 grants at an average grant of £75,000 per grant. This would cost central government approximately £4million per annum or £12m over three years. This £12m could raise an additional £12m in independent investment and result in 54 projects each with the potential to save the equivalent costs to public sector services of £1m p.a. (Talk Don’t Walk Invest to Save project evidence). This is a net £150m saving for public sector costs over three years.
appendix 1

ACPO guidance

The guidance sets out a range of risk assessment tools for officers and supports risk management processes. Key links to other organisations, including the National Missing Persons Helpline (now 'Missing People') are highlighted for assistance in missing investigations.

The emphasis within the ACPO guidance is that an incident is not complete until a return interview is completed which should examine the following issues:

- Reason for incident
- Were they a victim of crime during incident
- Have they committed a crime during the incident
- Have they been harboured
- Intelligence on addresses
- Assess potential preventative measures

There is a specific reference to young people missing from care where the importance of an independent interview is highlighted and how voluntary sector organisations can be supportive in the development of schemes to implement these recommendations.

The guidance also highlights the role of multi-agency partnerships in establishing categories of absence, management of return and inter-agency protocols when managing children missing from care. The structure of protocols is suggested including explicit reference to the DoH LAC 17 (2002). Specimen protocols are provided in the appendices of the ACPO guidance.

Categories of missing from care are suggested:

- Unauthorised absence
- Low risk – no threat of danger
- Medium risk – likely threat of danger
- High risk – immediate danger

Information recording is a key element of the guidance and as such should comply with the police intelligence recording standards as set out by the Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO, now subsumed into the National Police Improvement Agency). There is a requirement that all information recorded should comply with this national standard in order to make the data accessible for analysis and sharing with national agencies.
appendix 2

Children Act 2004

The Act sets out the requirement for services to be co-ordinated and for Children’s Services to set about promoting co-operation. This duty is encapsulated in the Children’s Trusts which are designed to deliver integrated targeted working:

“While integrated delivery can be fostered in many ways, and at many levels, making sure the system overall is meeting the right needs for the right children and young people requires effective integrated strategies:

- A joint needs assessment
- Shared decisions on priorities
- Identification of all available resources
- Joint plans to deploy them

This joint commissioning, underpinned by pooled resources, will ensure that those best able to provide the right packages of services can do so. (http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims/childrenstrusts/)

Section 13 sets out the requirement for every authority to establish a Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). The relevance of the LSCB to runaways is in its function to ensure co-ordination and effectiveness of the services delivered for safeguarding and promoting welfare.

Section 17 sets out the requirement for every authority to prepare a Children and Young People’s Plan in order to set out the authorities strategy for delivering services to children and young people.


The Children’s Society is a leading national charity and service provider. Our direct action, delivering solutions and results through a network of projects, supports children who face danger, discrimination and disadvantage in their daily lives. We turn around the lives of tens of thousands of children and their families every year. Key amongst our areas of operation is the work we do with runaway children at risk on the streets. We provide real solutions for individual cases, while our pioneering research and influential campaigning protects the rights of all children. Our work is driven by the belief that every child deserves a good childhood and we are committed to creating better childhoods for all.